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British team off to Iraq seeking business chances

By a Jordan Times Staff Reporter

AMMAN — A group of British businessmen headed for Baghdad on Friday, joining the stepped up flow of international traders into the Iraqi capital amid expectations that the U.N. sanctions imposed on that country are on their way to be eased if not lifted altogether.

The 20-member group, which arrived here Wednesday, is expected to spend about a week in Iraq, meeting government officials and private sector businessmen.

Stephen Crouch of the British Middle East Interests Group said the visit was mostly aimed at gathering "market intelligence" that would allow the businessmen to update themselves about the situation in Iraq.

"There are many such groups visiting Iraq," Mr. Crouch told the Jordan Times.

Some members of the group, whose visit has been cleared by the British government — one of the most ardent opponents of easing or lifting of the sanctions against Iraq — were expected to return to Amman in four or five days while others might extend their visit to include areas beyond Baghdad.

The identities of the businessmen have not been disclosed because of what Reuter described as possible adverse publicity in Britain. But they were from a 30-member British business team which held talks in Amman on British-Jordanian trade and industrial opportunities.

The team's visit to Iraq was announced in January after the British government allowed it to go ahead with it.

Mr. Crouch said the British Middle East Interests Group, which he represents, was not directly involved in the visit to Iraq although some of the visitors are linked to the group.

Three other British businessmen are already in the Iraqi capital ahead of the group which left Friday.

"What British companies are concerned about with Iraq is that they are losing touch with who really runs the country," Mr. Crouch was quoted as saying by Reuter.

"The companies simply want to keep in touch and appraise what future requirements might be," said Mr. Crouch, in an apparent reference to expectations that the

four-year-old sanctions against Iraq could be eased or lifted soon.

Food and medicine are exempt from the sanctions, and as such, some of the British businessmen who represent the sugar and pharmaceutical industry might sign deals during the visit.

Others in the group included representatives of water and agriculture sectors.

Immediate prospects of any international company securing huge contracts from Iraq even if the sanctions were to be lifted soon are unclear.

Many market analysts believe that the Iraqi government would not have enough funds to launch any large-scale reconstruction from oil revenues. Mandatory U.N. resolutions call for the appropriation by the U.N. of nearly 40 per cent of Iraq's income from oil exports — as and when allowed — to be channelled to a war reparations fund and to pay for U.N. costs of monitoring the ceasefire that ended the war over Kuwait in 1991.

"If the sanctions were to be eased or lifted tomorrow, it is unlikely that there would be massive business in non-essential items or medium-level consumer products," said a Jordanian trader who has had extensive experience in dealing with Iraq.

"There would be a significant amount of imports of foodstuffs into Iraq as the country would seek to rebuild its strategic reserves before going to other sectors of the market," said the businessman, who preferred to remain anonymous.

Mr. Crouch conceded as much. He told Reuter that initially at least Iraq would be a "spare-parts market."

French and Italian companies lead the inter-European competition for business with Iraq. Hundreds of businesses from these countries visited Baghdad in 1994.

Many Third World countries, particularly those which sympathised with Iraq during the Gulf crisis, have also sent trade delegations to the country after the end of the war over Kuwait.

Iraki officials have repeatedly said that the Baghdad government would give preference in post-sanctions trade to countries which helped Iraq after the war by releasing Iraqi assets and helping Iraq secure essential items through deferred payment facilities.

Europarliament rules out early accord on Turkey

STRASBOURG (R) — The European Parliament on Thursday threw further doubt on European Union (EU) plans for a lucrative customs deal with Turkey, saying Ankara's human rights record was too poor for the deal to be allowed to go through.

Europarlamentarians adopted a resolution describing Turkey's rights record as "too grave to allow for the formation of the proposed customs union at present."

They said they would not approve a deal granting Turkey access to EU markets unless they heard reports of progress in the human rights area.

Under the Maastricht treaty, the parliament, the EU's only directly elected body, has the power to block deals

such as the customs union. European Union foreign ministers have been working hard to agree a deal that would allow Greece, Turkey's long-time rival, to drop its veto of the customs union.

In exchange for Athens lifting its objections, the EU would begin negotiations on EU membership with Cyprus six months after the end of the bloc's review of its own future, which is due to begin next year.

Greece is keen to see Cyprus, partitioned into Greek and Turkish communities since 1974, join the union. It has, however, been holding off lifting its veto, demanding various clarifications and concessions.

The customs union, which foresees sharp two-way reductions in trade barriers by

1996, would give Turkey some of the closest links to the EU of a non-member country and unblock as much as \$1 billion in aid.

Thursday's move by the parliament means that even if Greece does lift its veto at a scheduled March 6 meeting in Brussels, major hurdles still lie ahead.

Europarlamentarians have long been critical of Turkey's human rights record, particularly its treatment of its Kurdish minority.

In their resolution, they urged the Turkish government to reform the country's constitution "to better guarantee the protection of democracy and human rights."

They said they would make approval of the customs union conditional on interim

progress reports.

British socialist Pauline Green, who heads the assembly's largest single political group, said on Tuesday that parliament should reconsider the question in September.

EU member states have also raised the issue of human rights in Turkey, but tend to agree that helping Turkey economically is better than keeping it in the cold.

"Isolating Turkey would not benefit the democratic forces but the trade must be linked to human rights,"

Swedish Foreign Minister Lena Hjelm-Wallen said on Wednesday after talks with her Turkish counterpart, Murat Karayalcin.

Turkey's Islam-based Welfare Party (RP) said on Thursday the proposed customs deal with Europe amounted to treason.

Police left empty-handed.

"I am not afraid of the police," Mr. Marzel told AFP after visiting the grave

atay, there is no reason for us to come back," he added.

A resident of Chicago for 26 years, Mr. Jaber owns a supermarket and is chairman of the American-Arab Chamber of Commerce there. His wife, children and two grandchildren also live in the city.

He and Mr. Barkat were detained near Tel Aviv upon arrival Feb. 9, carrying cash for the Muslim fundamentalist Islamic Jihad. They were arrested upon arrival in the country Feb. 9.

The group, opposed to peace talks and dedicated to Israel's destruction, has claimed the suicide bombing that killed 20 soldiers and a civilian in central Israel on Jan. 22.

In an interview with the Associated Press Thursday at his mother's Jerusalem home, Mr. Jaber, who was released Sunday without any charges pressed, saying the money he was carrying was meant to pay for a new addition to his mother's house.

He said he was happy to be leaving Israel and blamed U.S. officials for not trying enough to ease his plight.

"It is the ambition of all Palestinians to come back and invest in their homeland after struggling (to make money) for so many years," said Mr. Jaber. "Unless.. we are safe to come to this country

to stay."

"I am a peaceful man and I am against any terrorist acts from both sides. We were happy to see the peace process," he said. Now, "I am going back to the States as soon as I can. I don't want to stay here."

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UNHRC criticises Israel

GENEVA (AP) — The U.N. Human Rights Commission (UNHRC) decided Friday to end 28 years of scrutiny of violations in South Africa, but reiterated its annual criticism of Israel.

The 53-nation body unanimously agreed to drop South Africa from its future agenda, and thanked two special working groups for efforts to "eliminate apartheid in South Africa and to establish a non-racial and democratic society."

"The commission has today closed an important chapter in its history," said Chief South African delegation Riana Eksteen. "It is a chapter that neither South Africa nor the commission hopes to reopen."

The nation's first all-race elections were held last April, resulting in a majority for the African National Congress (ANC).

Condemnation of "racial discrimination in South Africa occupied a large chunk of the commission's annual six-week session ever since the

country was placed under special scrutiny in 1967.

For years it shared the slot of most criticised nation with Israel. Thanks to the developing country majority on the commission, many African and Arab nations with poor human rights records escaped attention.

That has slowly changed, with investigations into alleged abuses in countries like Iran, Iraq, Zaire and Sudan. However, the Tel Aviv government should end because progress is reflected in this resolution," he added. The United States, Russia and Norway put forward the motion.

A U.N. special investigator, former Swiss Foreign Minister Rene Felber, earlier this month said his mandate should end because progress in the peace process was more important than ritual condemnation of Israel which was ignored by the Tel Aviv government.

However, other commission decisions were little changed from previous years.

It voted 27-1 in favour of a proposal by Arab countries demanding Israel stop violations and withdraw from the occupied Palestinian territories, including Jerusalem.

The United States voted against. There were 22 abstentions, including European nations.

A resolution demanding Israeli withdrawal from the Syrian Golan Heights was passed by 25-1 with 23 abstentions.

U.S. to pay Italian bank \$400m to settle Iraq claims

WASHINGTON (AP) —

The U.S. government has agreed to pay \$400 million to settle claims by a major Italian bank whose Atlanta branch funnelled \$5.5 billion in loans to Iraq in the years before the Gulf war, the Justice Department announced Thursday.

The money will be paid to settle the Italian bank's claim for more than \$450 million resulting from Iraq's default on U.S. government-guaranteed loans with which Iraq bought a wide variety of American farm products.

Iraq defaulted on the loans in August 1990 after it invaded Kuwait. Banca Nazionale del Lavoro (BNL), which is owned by the Italian government, and nine other banks that helped finance sales of U.S. farm commodities to Iraq filed claims for reimbursement under the Agriculture Department's export-credit guarantee programme.

Now that guarantee programme, known as the Commodity Credit Corporation, will pay BNL \$400 million.

Some Democratic lawmakers, led by Representative Henry B. Gonzalez of Texas, have alleged that Iraq used at least some of the money obtained under the CCC programme to develop its military and nuclear arsenals before it invaded Kuwait.

Payment of BNL's claim had been held up for several years by a criminal investigation of its Atlanta branch, which funnelled the \$5.5 billion in illegal loans to Iraq.

The former manager of the branch, Christopher Drogoul, pleaded guilty to wire fraud and submitting false reports to bank regulators and was sentenced in November 1993 to three years in prison. Several co-defendants also received prison terms.

Last month, a 1½-year investigation by a federal prosecutor concluded that Bush administration officials did not illegally arm Iraq through the agricultural export programme and that BNL's top officials in Rome were not responsible for the fraud in Atlanta.

That conclusion cleared the way for the settlement to reimburse BNL.

"Now that the investigation of BNL is complete, the (CCC) is honouring its guarantees," the Justice Department statement said.

NEWS IN BRIEF

Europe has no role in Mideast peace talks — Hariri

BEIRUT (R) — Lebanon said on Friday the European Union (EU) has no significant role to play in Arab-Israeli peace talks. "Europe's role in the Arab-Israeli talks is not essential nor effective... the United States is the main power behind pushing the peace talks forward," Prime Minister Rafik Hariri said. He was commenting to Lebanese journalists on last week's tour of Syria, Israel, Gaza and Lebanon by French Foreign Minister Alain Juppe at the head of an EU delegation seeking to push forward the Middle East peace process.

Cyprus capital changes name to Lefkosa

NICOSIA (R) — Nicosia, the capital of Cyprus, has changed its name to Lefkosa as part of a campaign on the island to standardise spellings of place names. The change was voted unanimously by the municipal council late on Thursday makes the spelling conform to the way the city's name is pronounced in Greek, Mayor Lelios Demetriadis said. "The government wants to standardise geographical names and Nicosia... is spelled as Lefkosa. I suggested that next to Lefkosa we have in brackets Nicosia to avoid confusion," Mr. Demetriadis told Reuters. The decision must be reviewed by the republic's council of ministers as a matter of routine. Mr. Demetriadis said the council had held up the name change briefly to consider whether it might cause confusion with the Turkish name for the city, which is Lefkosa.

Stop smoking U.S. cigarettes — Hizbullah

BEIRUT (AFP) — The leader of the pro-Iranian Hizbullah movement in Lebanon, Sheikh Hassan Nasrallah, has called for a boycott of U.S. cigarettes and luxury items. "We call on our people to boycott U.S. products which they can do without, such as cigarettes and luxury items... because America is an economic market controlled by giant companies which control politics and the military," he said. Sheikh Nasrallah denounced the United States as the "real and principal enemy" of Islam and said the boycott should spread to other Arab and Muslim countries.

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"Now that the investigation of BNL is complete, the (CCC) is honouring its guarantees," the Justice Department statement said.

Washington is urging signatories to renew the treaty indefinitely at a meeting due to be held in New York in April instead of adopting it for another limited period.

Mr. Zarif, who is in charge of the ministry's legal and international affairs, argued that the "number of countries with access to nuclear weapons has increased after the signing of the treaty, with Israel being a notable example."

"Iran attaches great importance to the NPT, but certain revisions are necessary," he said. All countries with nuclear arms should set an "exact date when they plan to destroy their weapons prior to the treaty's extension."

Moscow has said that it would help Iran develop its nuclear energy industry despite U.S. warnings that Tehran might turn nuclear material for military purposes.

But U.S. Secretary of State Warren Christopher said Monday that the United States would continue to pressure Russia not to hand over nuclear technology to the Islamic republic.

"We have abided by all the commitments to the NPT as the international Atomic Energy Agency has determined after inspecting our facilities," Mr. Zarif said.

Officials have said previously that Iran may not sign an indefinite extension of the treaty if Israel refuses to join.

Mr. McMullan, who was welcomed at the airport by Minister of Industry and Trade Ali Abul Raghieh, is also due to formally inaugurate

Embassy in Am

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S IN BRIEF

In Mideast peace talks — Haif

signified role to play in Arab- Israeli affairs. The United States is the peace talks forward. He was accompanied by French Foreign Minister Alain Delanoë, seeking to join the peace process.

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J.S. cigarettes — Hizbullah

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sheikh Hassan Nasrallah, has

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such as cigarettes and luxury items, as well as the Department of Antiquities.

He said that since it assumed office last autumn, the Swedish government had taken a decision to expand technical assistance to the Kingdom and promote its economic and political ties with the countries of the Middle East region.

Referring to a recent Swedish government decision to apply austerity measures, the ambassador said the move was needed "in view of the serious financial crisis the Kingdom of Sweden was facing at the moment."

Each government department in Sweden has been instructed to cut down

Australian trade team arrives for talks on strengthening ties

AMMAN (J.T.) — Australia's Trade Minister Bob McMullan arrived in Amman Friday on a three-day visit to Jordan for talks with government officials and the business community on strengthening trade and economic ties between Australia and Jordan.

In an arrival statement, the Australian minister expressed happiness for the visit and his country's satisfaction with the level of economic and trade relations with the Kingdom.

He stressed Canberra's desire to bolster Jordanian-Australian relations and increase the volume of trade between the two countries.

The Australian minister, who is due to open his meetings with Jordanian officials Saturday, is accompanied by a large team of Australian businesspeople representing major Australian firms.

Mr. McMullan is also due to lead the Australian side to the joint Jordanian-Australian Economic and Trade Committee meetings to explore further ways to promote trade.

Australia hopes to increase its sales of livestock, meat, dairy products and cereal to the Kingdom, and Jordan hopes to increase its sales of phosphate and fertilisers and potash to Australia, according to government and Australian embassy sources.

Mr. McMullan, who was welcomed at the airport by Minister of Industry and Trade Ali Abul Raghib, is also due to formally inaugu-

Embassy in Amman not to close, as earlier decided

Sweden to expand aid to Jordan, envoy says

By Elia Nasrallah
Jordan Times Staff Reporter

AMMAN — The government of Sweden intends to expand the level of technical aid to Jordan as a means to bolster its ties with the Kingdom and help it meet the requirements of development, according to Sweden's Ambassador to Jordan Christian Bausch Friday.

The ambassador said that Sweden had been providing technical assistance to the Ministry of Public Works, to the Traffic Department to improve the condition of roads and reduce the number of accidents, to the Telecommunications Corporation (TCC), the Jordan Electricity Authority as well as the Department of Antiquities.

He said that since it assumed office last autumn, the Swedish government had taken a decision to expand technical assistance to the Kingdom and promote its economic and political ties with the countries of the Middle East region.

Referring to a recent Swedish government decision to apply austerity measures, the ambassador said the move was needed "in view of the serious financial crisis the Kingdom of Sweden was facing at the moment."

Each government department in Sweden has been instructed to cut down

expenses, the Foreign Ministry, for its part, is bound to save \$24 million, said Mr. Bausch.

An initial decision taken by Sweden to close down 15 diplomatic missions abroad to save funds was cancelled and only two embassies and two consulates are to be affected by the decision.

"I am happy to say that Jordan is excluded from the Foreign Ministry's decision which was taken for purely financial reasons," said the ambassador.

"Since there is no political reason behind the austerity programme, the Foreign Ministry in Stockholm has decided to implement the programme by not closing diplomatic missions but rather through changing the approach and through a shift in the concept," continued the ambassador.

He said that the Foreign Ministry hopes to ensure the success of the austerity programme for at least three coming years by cutting down on expenses like diplomats' benefits, opting for cheaper housing for them and other similar means.

Despite the austerity programme, the ambassador added, Sweden will continue to supply capital aid to the poor countries, especially those in Africa, through the European Union (EU) which Sweden has joined since the beginning of this year.



FRIDAY SERMONS — His Royal Highness Crown Prince Hassan attends Friday prayers at the Jubeiba grand mosque. The Crown Prince listened to the Friday sermon which focused on the Badr battle which took place on 17 Ramadan between the prophet Mohammad's followers and his

opponents who mobilised their forces against him in a bid to stop the Islamic dawa from spreading into the Arab Peninsula. The Friday preacher said the Badr battle was a turning point in the history of lessons learnt from the Badr battle which prayer were senior military and civil official (Petra photo)

Businesses warned against 'unclear' potential Nigerian clients

By P.V. Vivekanand
Jordan Times Staff Reporter

AMMAN — Jordanian businessmen have been warned against doing business with any Nigerian company without clearing the background of the potential client with the Nigerian authorities, officials and business said Friday.

The warning was issued after cases surfaced of a new Nigerian con scheme involving manufacturers of satellite dishes in Jordan, they said.

Nigeria is internationally notorious for genuinely sounding deals that hold out promises of millions of dollars in quick profits but turn out to be nothing but scams.

Law enforcement in this African country is also weak, and many who have had experience in dealing with Nigerian firms say that a large segment of the officialdom also appeared to be partners in crime with conmen.

The officials and business said the latest warning was issued by the Amman Chamber of Commerce, which had received a notification from the Nigerian embassy in Baghdad.

According to the officials and businessmen, the new Nigerian scam involved orders for satellite dishes, a mushrooming industry in Jordan.

They said manufacturers received orders for satellite dishes by the dozen but there were no letters of

credit — the accepted traditional way of doing business — to support the order.

Instead, the importers, in order to avoid costly huking charges and delays — as Nigerians are anxious to use the dishes to watch football games, "would offer to settle the payment by cheque against shipping documents."

The importers gathered additional air of authenticity, given that Nigeria was supposed to be hosting the World Youth Soccer Cup. The games have been cancelled but it appears that the con scheme was hatched at the height of expectations that they would go ahead as planned.

"The cheques issued by the so-called importers turned out to be forged, and there was no legal recourse for the exporter to recover his money since the importers had ceased to exist at the addresses as given in the orders," said an official of the Amman Chamber of Commerce.

Thousands of offices operate in Lagos, the Nigerian capital, which offer "address" facilities without question, allowing the confidence tricksters to have a "respectable" address in Lagos but with little legitimacy.

"You can change office addresses in Lagos more easily than you can change your shirt," commented a Jordanian who studied in Africa.

The scam over satellite dishes is a revised version of a con scheme which

seems to have petered out in the last two years. That scheme involved authentic-sounding invitations to Jordanian businessmen to help spirit tens of millions of dollars out of Nigeria — described as commission to be paid to senior Nigerian government officials that would be transferred outside the country — and receive up to 20 per cent as fees for "services rendered."

Hundreds, if not thousands, in Jordan received such invitations during the late 1980s and early 90s. Many took up the invitation and went ahead, but most of them stepped back at a stage when several thousand dollars had to be committed into the scam before the "millions" could be extracted. But several others threw caution to the winds, went "all the way," and never heard of the thousands they paid along the promised millions.

Again, none of the victims — not only from Jordan but from practically every country — had legal recourse to recover their money simply because the very illegality of the scheme dissuaded them from approaching the Nigerian government with complaints.

The determined few who went after their money to Lagos suffered more losses — some were kept hostage in their hotel rooms until their families paid ransom — and were often expelled from the country on trumped-up charges.

Swaqa prison to skill-train more inmates, expand scope of operations

AMMAN (Petra) — The workshops at Swaqa prison, south of Amman, are planning to expand their operations and increase the number of inmates wishing to learn a trade and do productive work, according to prison director, Colonel Hassan Smadi Friday.

He said that the prison operates leather, carpentry and blacksmiths workshops which produce woodwork and metal products like school desks, and metal cupboards, as well as different types of leather products.

The move to expand comes in light of the Council of Minister's instructions to government departments to order their needs of wood and metal products from the prison whenever this is possible, said Col. Smadi.

He said that the Ministry of Education has given its consent to buying at least 30 per

cent of its requirements for school rooms from the prison's workshops.

According to Col. Smadi, the prison workshops also include a laundry which can cater to the needs of large numbers of hotels and other organisations since it starts to fully operate. At present the laundry is covering the needs of the nearby community colleges, added Col. Smadi.

He said that the prison is operating a livestock project, in cooperation with the Ministry of Agriculture, and large areas of land have been reclaimed and planted with fruit trees and animal feed.

These workshops, he explained, are all operating under the direct supervision of specialists and technicians who are helping the inmates transform their life and learn a trade for their future.

Major General Moham-

mad Tarazi, assistant Public Security Department director, and Brigadier Ali Abul Isam, director of the reformatory centres (prisons), the inmates at Swaqa prison are encouraged to learn trades, enjoy regular health care from the Health Ministry, religious guidance from the Ministry of Awqaf and Religious Affairs, Culture in cooperation with the Ministry of Education, as well as sports programmes.

The prison administration, they said, have worked out plans for improving the sanitary services, sports facilities and vocational workshops during 1995.

They added that plans are

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Mandela pledges war on crime

S. African police block students after protests

CAPE TOWN (AFP) — President Nelson Mandela Friday vowed to fight corruption, crime and racism as he reopened South Africa's parliament, defending his government's record in the wake of strong criticism.

Inaugurating the second session of the first democratically elected parliament, Mr. Mandela also promised an "investor-friendly climate" under continued fiscal discipline.

On Tuesday, Mr. Mandela's own estranged wife Winnie, who has a deputy minister's post, compelled to make a public apology for a scathing attack on the government, which she had accused in a speech of failing to tackle racism in the workplace.

The administration has also come under fire in some quarters for alleged pampering to the white minority in its bid for national reconciliation and failing to address black majority needs.

While not directly addressing critics, Mr. Mandela acknowledged that the government, which took office after the first all-race elections in April 1994, had made mistakes, but said this was "an inevitable element in the process of learning."

"It is always the case that the spectators are better than the players on the field," he said.

"Whatever the teething problems," Mr. Mandela said, "the government of national unity "has succeeded in its intentions of

ensuring cooperation among our people as a whole."

In a speech critical of habits acquired both by whites and blacks under apartheid, Mr. Mandela warned against racism, violence and disruption as a means of achieving political ends.

"The battle against the forces of anarchy and chaos has been joined," he said. "Let no one say they have not been warned."

Addressing "those who have... misread freedom to mean license," Mr. Mandela said: "Let me... make this abundantly clear that the small minority in our midst which wears the mask of anarchy will meet its match in the government."

"We are not afraid of struggle. We are, after all, a product of confrontation and struggle."

The rising crime rate "cannot be tolerated," he declared. "We must take the war to the criminals and no longer allow the situation in which are mere sitting ducks."

He stressed that it should be fought in a fair and just manner.

"At all times we must guarantee the right of the accused to be heard, without making any concession to the primal instinct to pillory and hurt people at the stake," he said.

"We need to educators with the regard to the matter of rooting out corruption, which we will deal with firmly and unequivocally, whoever may be involved," he said.

Mr. Mandela warned that the government "has extremely limited resources to address the many and urgent needs of our people."

"All of us... must rid ourselves of the wrong notion that the government has a big bag full of money," he said.

"The government does not have such riches."

"Those who are responsible for these crimes of racism must be brought to book without delay," he said. "It is clear that insufficient progress has been made... to deal with this cancer."

"The situation cannot be allowed in which anyone acts in a manner which perpetuates the practice of apartheid."

Corruption — an issue that has gained prominence with recent accusations against African National Congress veterans Allan Boesak and Winnie Mandela — is a legacy of apartheid that "has deeply infected the fibre of our society," Mr. Mandela said.

But he stressed that it should be fought in a fair and just manner.

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"We need to educators with the regard to the matter of rooting out corruption, which we will deal with firmly and unequivocally, whoever may be involved," he said.

Mr. Mandela warned that the government "has extremely limited resources to address the many and urgent needs of our people."

"All of us... must rid ourselves of the wrong notion that the government has a big bag full of money," he said.

"The government does not have such riches."

"There are signs that our

economy is beginning to pick up," he said, vowing to seek "sustained and high levels of economic growth... (and) in particular to ensure the creation of an investor friendly climate."

"I would... like to emphasize our continuing commitment to fiscal discipline," Mr. Mandela said.

President Mandela, reaffirming the new South Africa's place in the family of nations, Friday pledged particular attention to his country's relations with its southern African neighbours.

In the foreign policy segment of his state of the nation address, Mr. Mandela said he was "inspired by the reality of progressive developments in our region."

He cited the elections in Botswana, Malawi, Mozambique and Namibia, the restoration of democracy in Lesotho with the reinstatement of King Mosheshoe II and the signing of the Angula peace agreement.

"In all our actions," Mr. Mandela said, "we must move from the position that the fundamental objective we must pursue is friendship, cooperation and solidarity among the peoples of our region."

He reiterated South Africa's "willingness to contribute whatever we can" to establish peace and democracy in Angola.

South Africa seeks an active part in the debate on "the new world order, focusing in particular on such matters as a democratic international political order, universal prosperity, peace and stability — all of which are questions of great relevance to our own continent of Africa," he said.

"We must treat this matter with all due sensitivity, conscious of the history of our region, including the destruction caused by the policy of aggression and destabilisation" of South Africa's previous apartheid regime, he said.

"There are signs that our



A woman pleads with bystanders after she was mugged and robbed off her glasses and other belongings during a protest by 10,000 schoolchildren in Cape Town city centre Thursday.

The protesting pupils flocked to government offices to demand places in schools formerly reserved for whites. The protest came as whites in the working class suburb of Ruyterwacht said they would not allow black pupils to use the vacant school in their area (AFP photo)

school in the mainly-white working-class Ruyterwacht suburb.

The provincial government Thursday closed the school saying it was a health risk.

Provincial Education Minister Martha Ockers said black students had caused extensive damage to the school, breaking toilets, wash basins and water pipes.

Pupils and teachers, prevented from going to Cape Town, told reporters they were determined to get to the city.

"We are marching to Guguletu where we will get on the trains and go to town," a student said.

At Ruyterwacht, 15 kilometres away, whites armed with clubs, chains and whips were out in force to case the black students returned to the school.

French writer accused in cocaine trial

PARIS (AFP) — French writer Francoise Sagan faces possible 18-month suspended jail sentence and a 50,000 franc (\$9,300) fine on charges of possessing and handing cocaine. Prosecutor Bernard Fos called for the writer, who has been on trial since Feb. 10, along with 25 other defendants, to receive the sentences in connection with the offences, which allegedly occurred in 1992. Sagan, who appeared in court Wednesday for the first time since the trial began, said she does not currently use cocaine, but that at the time of the alleged offences it "helped her" following a number of bereavements. The writer defended her right to use drugs. "Every human being is free if his or her freedom does not affect that of others," told the court. "Laws are made to be adopted to people, not to the other way round." Sagan was given a six-month suspended sentence and a 10,000 franc (\$1,800) fine for a similar offence in March 1992 in Lyon. The Paris prosecutor urged penalties ranging from three months suspended to seven years for the other defendants involved in the case, who allegedly range from casual users to full-time traffickers.

Vanessa Paradis arrested for drugs possession

MONTREAL (R) — French singer and actress Vanessa Paradis was arrested at Montreal's Dorval Airport and charged with possession of hashish, the Canadian Press (CP) news agency reported. U.S. custom officers say they found about three grammes (0.1 ounces) of hashish in her luggage, according to CP. Paradis was on her way to New York City, it said. She was released after posting a \$300 bond and was ordered to appear in court in Montreal next month. CP said CP quoted reports as saying Paradis then got on a plane to go back home to Paris. French radio reported Paradis had been in Canada to promote the film *Elisa* with actor Gerard Depardieu.

God Must Have Forgotten Me!

JORDAN'S Middle East Investment Bank will raise its capital to 10 million dinars (\$14.2 million) in a private placement to allow it to expand banking services. Its general manager has said: "We have finalised measures to raise our capital and it has been agreed to raise it by a private placement with 50 per cent from old shareholders and the rest from new investors." Marwan Awad, general manager of the Middle East Investment Bank, told Reuters. He said the rise in capital to 10 million dinars (\$14.2 million) from four million dinars (\$5.7 million) would be finalised in two months. It has been approved by an extraordinary general assembly. The bank, one of the Jordan's six investment banks, was given central bank approval last year to engage in commercial banking on completion of raising its capital. He said the bank's operating profits were 100,000 dinars (\$142,857) in 1994, reversing a loss of 140,000 dinars (\$208,571) the previous year. Mr. Awad said both the capital rise and a management restructuring of the bank will allow it to improve its deposit base and return to net profit in 1995. Total assets rose in 1994 to 50 million dinars (\$71.4 million) from 28 million (\$40.0 million) in 1993.

Major rocked by divisions over Europe, polls

LONDON (R) — British voters and opinion polls underline the unpopularity of Prime Minister John Major Friday and opposition leader Tony Blair said the Conservative government was paralysed by its splits over Europe.

The Conservative candidate at a parliamentary by-election in south Wales Thursday suffered a humiliating defeat, finishing a poor fourth with less than four per cent of the vote.

The warning was delivered after Chancellor of the Exchequer (Finance Minister) Kenneth Clarke denied in a newspaper interview that a single European currency would threaten Britain's position as an nation state.

That argument put Mr. Clarke at odds with anti-European ministers, including Jonathan Aitken, his number two at the treasury, who said he would hesitate to reiterate the party's objections to creating any

In a rebuff to Mr. Clarke Thursday, Mr. Major said in a letter to Labour finance spokesman Gordon Brown that a single currency would raise significant "economic and political and constitutional issues."

Mr. Clarke's predecessor, Norman Lamont, was expected to pour fuel on the flames with a speech insisting that a single currency would inevitably be a step on the road to a united states of Europe.

In the ICM opinion poll published in the *Guardian*, Labour had 49 per cent of the national vote against 31 per cent for the Conservatives.

This was after pollsters adjusted raw polling figures in the ruling party's favour to reflect the known reluctance of Conservatives at present to admit they support the party.

India's 'Bandit Queen' embraces Buddhism

NAGPUR, India (AFP) — Indian "Bandit Queen" Phoolan Devi, who spent 12 years behind bars for allegedly gunning down 22 men to avenge her gang rape, has converted to the Buddhist faith.

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The number of wounded you can expect an equal or larger number of killed," said Mr. Boegli.

Khmer Rouge radio Friday claimed that 400 government soldiers had been killed in the fighting in which 3,000 troops are involved. Another 700 had died from malaria and 1,200 had deserted from the coalition government's forces, they claimed.

Camodian Co-Defence Minister Tea Channath Thursday said the government army planned to lay

siege to the ancient 10th century temple in Preah Vihear, located on the Thai-Cambodian border.

"We encourage the public to fly Royal Jordanian, the airline decided on measures by which certain flights will be arranged at prices that could be lower than 50 per cent of the cost of an economy class ticket. These flights, which will be outside the normal schedule, will not require prior reservation (Al Rabi).

The Jordanian and U.S. governments are currently drawing a broad outline for a free trade agreement between the two countries.

According to Western diplomatic sources, the agreement is expected to be signed in October and will include provisions unifying customs fees on products between Jordan and the U.S.

The agreement is also expected to remove customs barriers on American goods, especially cars, on condition that Jordanian products exported to the U.S. are given the same treatment (Al Du

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Bosnian government soldiers leave the "Raniz Saloin" barracks in the outskirts of Sarajevo to go to the nearby front line. Bosnian Serb leader Radovan Karadzic

Fighting rages in Bihac despite peace efforts

SARAJEVO (R) — Fighting raged around the Muslim enclave of Bihac Friday as the major powers tried to get Serbian President Slobodan Milosevic to accept a peace plan.

United Nations peacekeepers reported heavy shelling to the north of the Bihac enclave of northwest Bosnia Thursday and through the night into Friday.

Several hundred mortar detonations were reported around Velika Kladusa on the Croatian border where Serb-backed Muslim rebels of local warlord Fikret Abdic are fighting government troops. Another 35 blasts were heard around Bihac town, the United Nations said.

Fighting in the U.N.-declared safe area threatens a seven-week-old ceasefire intended to lay the ground for negotiations on the latest international peace plan to end the war in Bosnia and settle conflicts in the former Yugoslavia.

Bosnian Serb forces surrounding the Muslim government 5th Corps in the area accuse their enemies of breaching the ceasefire with a massive push since mid-January. The Sarajevo government counters that Serbs are shelling their forces.

Russian Foreign Minister Andrei Kozyrev is due in Belgrade this weekend to present fresh proposals to Mr. Milosevic in return for using his influence over the Bosnian Serbs.

Mr. Kozyrev will try to sell

announced yesterday that his forces will smash the government troops if they will launch a new offensive in the Bihac pocket (AFP photo)

Mr. Milosevic the latest offer from the so-called contact group powers — Russia, the United States, France, Germany and Britain. Under the plan Belgrade would get relief from sanctions crippling rump Yugoslavia's economy in return for recognising Bosnia and Croatia.

"Everyone, not only us, now sees he (Milosevic) is a key figure who favours a settlement," Mr. Kozyrev said in Moscow after talks with international mediators Lord Owen and Thorvald Stoltenberg, who were in Belgrade Wednesday.

"An intensive dialogue is under way. Every party is making a contribution. As far as I can say, we are moving closer to each other," said Mr. Kozyrev, who has argued, against Washington, that Mr. Milosevic must be helped if a peace deal is to take hold.

Under the contact group plan Bosnia would be divided into roughly equal parts between the Bosnian Serb side and a Muslim-Croat federation.

Croatia would be recognised within its pre-war borders, including the 30 per cent of its territory, the Krajina, now held by Croatian Serbs.

Accepting such a deal would compel Mr. Milosevic to surrender the nationalist goal of a greater Serbia and leave him open to charges of abandoning ethnic Serbs to Muslim domination in Bosnia and Catholic domination in Croatia.

"Milosevic could lose elec-

tions over this," Mihajlo Markovic, second in command of the ruling Socialist Party, told Reuters. "Many Serbs would not like it. It would reduce the Serbs (in Krajina and Bosnia) to an endangered minority."

It is also not clear how much leverage the international community has over Mr. Milosevic.

Sanctions are damaging heavy industry but life in Belgrade goes on much as usual. The shops are full of smuggled western goods and petrol is available on any street corner — bought by the bottle from smugglers.

"He (Milosevic) is already criticised for making concessions without much benefit," Mr. Markovic said.

Bosnian Serb leader Radovan Karadzic, already isolated by his former ally Mr. Milosevic, is in no mood to compromise or talk peace.

He has no intention of embracing the contact group plan which would force his troops to surrender a large chunk of the 70 per cent of Bosnia they have won in three years of bloody battle against the Muslim forces.

"If the international community wants war, there will be war. If it wants peace than it will make peace, but not at our expense," Mr. Karadzic said Thursday.

Meanwhile a U.N. military spokesman said in Sarajevo Friday, food shortages in Bihac are serious, but no one has yet starved to death in the northwest Bosnian pocket.

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India to fence off Kashmir border with Pakistan

JAMMU, India (AFP) — India plans to fence off parts of its border with Pakistan in the northern state of Kashmir to prevent cross-border arms smuggling by Muslim militants, officials said here Friday.

Engineers will also install floodlights along the zone to help Indian security forces patrol the border in Kashmir, the officials said.

They did not say when the operation would begin, but added that almost 200 kilometres (120 miles) of border territory between the Aksahar and Paharpur sectors would be fenced off at a cost of \$100 million.

The sources said a survey showed that cross-border smuggling of weapons by the

Pakistani zone of the Himalayan province.

Pakistan denies the charge, saying it only extends moral and diplomatic support to the Muslim secessionist drive, which has left more than 10,000 people dead since 1989 when the rebellion gained momentum.

India fenced off parts of its 850-kilometre (510-mile) border with Pakistan in Punjab when Sikh separatists reached their peak in the northern state in the late 1980s.

Meanwhile eight Muslim rebels from the powerful Pakistan Hizbul Mujahideen group were killed near an Islamic shrine during a gunbattle with Indian troops Friday, a Hizbul press statement

said here.

Two militant leaders were among the eight killed near the mausoleum of Charshai, some 37 kilometres (23 miles) from the Srinagar, it said, adding that an unspecified number of security forces had died in the firefights.

Meanwhile, five militants were among seven people killed in overnight secessionist-linked violence across the troubled state, the Press Trust of India said Friday.

More than 10,000 people have died in Kashmir since 1989 when Muslim militants stepped up their campaign against Indian rule. India accuses Pakistan of fomenting militancy in Kashmir, its only Muslim-majority state, but Islamabad denies the charge.

N. Korea warns U.S. again

SEOUL, South Korea (AP) — In fit-for-far diplomacy, North Korea warned Friday it is ready to scrap a nuclear deal if Washington continues to try to impose "unjustifiable preconditions."

The warning, in a report by the North's Communist organ Rodong Sinmun, indicated the Communist government has no intention of changing its intransigence on the nuclear deal, although U.S. and South Korean officials say this may be a bargaining ploy.

The report said implementation of the accord will only occur on a step-by-step basis, with Washington taking the first step. It also rejected dialogue with South Korea as a precondition.

"As we declared more than once, it is our firm position that if the U.S. does a thing, we will do a thing and if the U.S. does two things, we will do the same," the paper said in a commentary.

"We have never made an empty talk. We mean what we say," said the commentator, carried by the North's official Korea Central News Agency (KCNA).

North Korea is unhappy with a U.S. plan to provide it with South Korean-made reactors under the Oct. 21

Spain in fresh political turmoil with new arrest

MADRID (R) — Spain faced fresh political turmoil Friday after a former top security official was remanded in jail on charges of involvement in a secret war against separatist Basque guerrillas in the 1980s.

Rafael Vera, secretary of state for security in the Interior Ministry for 11 years, was sent to prison without bail by investigating Judge Baltazar Garzon after four-and-a-half hours of questioning Thursday night.

Mr. Vera is the most senior former official named in the investigation into the anti-terrorist liberation group (GAL), which operated on the fringes of Spain's security forces.

The probe shook Prime Minister Felipe Gonzalez's minority Socialist government and Spain's financial markets late last year and in the first weeks of this year.

GAL killed 27 alleged Basque separatists in southern France between 1983 and 1987.

Before Mr. Vera, four ex-police and security officials, including Mr. Vera's personal secretary, had already been remanded in

custody since Judge Garzon reopened the case last December on the basis of fresh evidence from two former Basque region policemen themselves convicted of GAL crimes in 1991.

The political crisis triggered by the case saw financial markets and the peseta nosedive and brought repeated opposition calls for an early general election, but it appeared to have calmed in the past two or three weeks.

Financial markets rebounded on the back of general economic optimism and Mr. Gonzalez emerged a clear points winner from a bruising contest with conservative Popular Party (PP) leader Jose Maria Aznar in last week's state of the nation debate in parliament.

But news of Mr. Vera's arrest, although widely expected, added fuel to the smouldering fire.

PP spokesman Rodrigo Rato leapt to the attack, terming the jailing of the ex-security boss "a qualitative jump" in the level of suspected official involvement in GAL.

Washington maintains the South Korean model is the only viable option for financial reasons. South Korea says it will pay for most of the reactors' \$4 billion costs, but only if the model is adopted.

Another hitch is a U.S. demand that the North open dialogue with its southern capitalist rival, as part of the nuclear deal.

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Socialist leader to face trial

French conservatives move closer to all-out presidency war

PARIS (R) — France's rival conservatives moved closer to all-out war in the presidential election campaign Friday, trading accusations of sabotage and incompetence as polls showed a sharp drop in support for Prime Minister Edouard Balladur.

Former Centrist President Valery Giscard d'Estaing made a stinging attack on Mr. Balladur, the frontrunner for the April-May election, accusing him of weakness and seeking to please rather than govern.

Mr. Balladur and his supporters, worried by the slump in his standing in opinion polls, trained their guns on rivals splitting the conservative vote and accused them of running the suicidal risk of helping the opposition Socialists.

Three surveys this week said Mr. Balladur's lead over Socialist Lionel Jospin for the April 23 first round was narrowing, although they forecast he would easily win the May 7 run-off.

"Edouard Balladur, you must choose: Rule or please?" Mr. Giscard d'Estaing wrote in the leftist daily Liberation. "I have not seen any strong government action in what you have presented."

He said Mr. Balladur's presidential platform, unveiled this week, fell short of the drastic steps needed to curb a budget deficit and near-record 12.6 per cent unemployment.

"The French people do not like those that lead them... personally I do not intend to go into the year 2000 asleep," Mr. Giscard d'Estaing said, recovering his past presidential tone. He lost the presidency in 1981 to Socialist Francois Mitterrand.

His comments could hint at a rival presidential bid, either his own or that of centrist ex-Prime Minister Raymond Barre who is expected to announce his intentions next

French Prime Minister and presidential candidate Edouard Balladur waves at supporters as the candidate's Health Minister Simone Veil (2nd right) also attended the meeting (AFP photo)

sur-Maire, Budget Minister and spokesman of the candidate Nicolas Sarkozy (right) and Health Minister Simone Veil (2nd right) also attended the meeting (AFP photo)

Minister Alain Carignon who has been held for nearly five months in a graft inquiry.

Judicial sources said the court ordered Mr. Emmanuel and another former Socialist Party treasurer, Andre Laignel, to stand trial on suspicion of illicit party funding. It said they had not personally enriched themselves but that they could not be ignorant of the way the party was funded.

State prosecutors had asked for the case to be dismissed for lack of evidence. Both Mr. Emmanuel and Mr. Laignel, placed under investigation in 1993, have denied the accusations.

In another setback for the Socialist Party, a court ordered its leader Henri Emmanuelli to stand trial on suspicion of illicit party funding when he was treasurer.

"I find it saddening that the (centre-right) majority's first casualties in 1981 and 1988 are contributing to the division," Ms. Veil said. "Mr. Mitterrand beat Mr. Chirac and Mr. Barre in 1988."

"We are definitely, irredeemably, incurably, the world's most stupid right," Interior Minister Charles

Ecuador, Peru sign ceasefire agreement

BRASILIA (AFP) — Ecuador and Peru signed a ceasefire agreement here early Friday that calls for international observers to monitor a border area both countries have been fighting over since Jan. 26.

After consulting their governments, Deputy Foreign Ministers Eduardo Ponce, of Peru, and Marcelo Fernandez de Cordoba, of Ecuador, signed the agreement at 0450 GMT at the Brazilian Foreign Ministry at Itamaraty Palace, the official statement said.

The agreement was drawn up earlier this week by Argentina, Brazil, Chile and the United States, all guarantors of a 1942 border treaty that failed to demarcate a 78-kilometre (48-mile) area in the Andes' Condor range.

An observer mission made up of military officials from the four guarantor countries will head to the disputed border area within 48 hours, Brazilian Deputy Foreign Minister Sebastiao du Rego Barros said.

The observer mission will last 90 days but can be extended if needed, the agreement said.

The signing of the Itamaraty Peace Declaration was preceded by an announcement in Lima by Peruvian President Alberto Fujimori that he found the agreement generally "acceptable."

In a joint statement, the guarantor countries said they welcomed the peace accord, stressing that, in it, Quito and Lima had also agreed to bilateral negotiations to find a lasting solution to their border dispute.

Ecuador in 1960 unilaterally rejected the 1942 Rio Protocol that ended a war between the two countries.

A tentative truce had been

In this photo released by the Peruvian government, President Alberto Fujimori (left) poses with soldiers in the Cenepa River at the border with Ecuador. (AFP photo)

in place since Tuesday after Mr. Fujimori declared a unilateral ceasefire and Ecuador said its troops would only respond if fired upon.

At least 70 Peruvian and Ecuadorian soldiers have been killed since the border war began.

On Thursday, Ecuadorian President Sixto Duran Ballen said in Quito that clashes continued in the border conflict despite the truce and called for the full implementation of the ceasefire.

The agreement calls for a demilitarized zone in the disputed border zone and a gradual demobilization of military troops from both countries in all nearby areas.

The observer mission, which Argentinian Foreign Minister Guido Di Tella said Thursday in Buenos Aires would include 10 military and civilian officials from each guarantor country, will set up headquarters in the areas of greatest friction, such as the border posts of Tintaya and Base Sur, the accord said.

Back in Lima after a two-day visit to the disputed border area in the Andes' Con-

trado range, Mr. Fujimori told reporters and Red Cross representatives touring Tintaya and said it was still in Ecuadorian hands.

Both countries insisted the other started the latest round of fighting in the unmarked stretch of border at the headquarters of the

Jordan Times

An independent Arab political daily published in English by the Jordan Press Foundation
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جريدة عربية مستقلة تصدر باللغة الإنجليزية من قبل مؤسسة الأردن للطباعة والتوزيع

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Way out of logjam

THE EGYPTIAN-sponsored draft treaty to ban all mass destruction weapons in the Middle East, including Iran, was tailored specially to meet Israel's transparent objection to ratify the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT) and open the door for a comprehensive Arab endorsement of the proposal to extend the treaty indefinitely. The Israeli Prime Minister, Yitzhak Rabin, has repeatedly declared that his country will never renounce its military nuclear capability because of the Iranian and Iraqi nuclear potentials.

The extension of the NPT is up for consideration in April, but some Arab states, notably Egypt and Syria, have vowed not to put their seal of approval on any such extension without Israel's joining the countries already committed to this goal.

Arab League Secretary General Esmat Abdul Meguid has naturally picked up the Egyptian initiative and made it his own. But what seemed at the outset to be an Arab unifying stance on the NPT ended up becoming a major dividing policy when a meeting of experts of the Cairo-based Arab League failed Wednesday to recommend the endorsement of Cairo's position to the upcoming Arab Foreign Ministers' meeting in the Egyptian capital next month.

We believe that the idea of drafting a Middle East regional treaty banning all mass destruction weapons, including nuclear, biological and chemical arsenals, is supportable but may prove to be unworkable for an obvious reason: Israel's rejection of the NPT stems not only from its anxieties about other countries in the area developing or acquiring mass destruction bombs but also because it fears the long-term Arab might and its numerical edge. Given this reality and the fact that there is no way that Cairo and other Arab capitals with known nuclear know-how would ever accept to be bound by a treaty that does not bind Israel as well, the parties in this region of the world should look elsewhere for ideas to end this standoff than just to the proposed Middle East treaty outlawing all mass destruction weapons.

One way out is to keep at least Egypt, and maybe also other countries non-committal on the NPT and its extension for as long as necessary or basically until the Middle East becomes blessed with a truly comprehensive and just peace that would eliminate the option of war as a method to solve conflicts.

ARABIC PRESS COMMENTARIES

ON THE first anniversary of the Ibrahimi Mosque massacre, Arabs and Jews clashed in Hebron, and they are bound to continue clashing as long as they meet and as long as the Israelis occupy Arab land, said Al Ra'i daily. The Jewish settlers, in defiance of Arab feelings and in disregard to their religious sites, are continually provoking the Arabs and, with the help of the Israeli army, are desecrating Muslim shrines, said the paper. The paper said that the Palestinians, who offered so many sacrifices and many martyrs for the sake of securing freedom and ending the Israeli occupation, are ready to continue the struggle, and this was their message to the world and to the Israeli leadership on the first anniversary of the massacre. As long as Israel continues to delay the implementation of its agreements with the Palestinian leadership, the Palestinian lands are bound to witness further acts of violence and bloodshed, continued the daily. It said that the way for preventing friction is a total separation between Arabs and Jews and an end to Jewish settlement programmes on Arab land.

IBRAHIM ZAROUR, a columnist in Al Ra'i, said that Israel is the only Middle Eastern state that possesses nuclear weapons in addition to the other mass destruction weapons. Had it not been for America's continued economic, financial and other kinds of help, the Jewish state could never have possessed this terrible arsenal, which the Zionists use to threaten the Arab Nation, said the writer. It is natural then for the Arabs to feel insecure and for Egypt to demand that Israel sign the nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT) and open its nuclear installations to international inspection, said the writer. Washington is trying to blunt the concern raised by Cairo over this issue and is claiming that the Cairo-Tel Aviv dispute is a matter of difference of opinion, which the two sides would soon overcome, be added. But, he said, Egypt realises too well the grave danger inherent in Israel's arsenal and is determined to spearhead Arab efforts to see that the Israeli nuclear power is checked.

Jordanian Perspective

By Dr. Musa Kellani

Something 'entirely wrong' with peace process

THE ISRAELI decision to "ease" its siege of the occupied West Bank and the Gaza Strip was probably was only tangible outcome to Thursday's summit between Palestine Liberation Organisation (PLO) Chairman Yasser Arafat and Israeli Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin. But if that is touted as a breakthrough in the Israeli-Palestinian peace negotiations, then there is something seriously wrong in the entire process.

For one thing, the very essence of the Israel-PLO Declaration of Principles signed in September 1993 is the concept of negotiations to determine the future status of the West Bank and Gaza Strip. But it has been made abundantly clear since then that the Israeli perception of those "negotiations" is based on pressuring the Palestinians in all ways possible and force them succumb to whatever Israel dictates in terms of final status.

The Israeli cutoff of gasoline to the Gaza Strip for several days last week and Israel's denial to allow fuel supplies to the Strip from Jordan or from Egypt were the best examples of this mentality.

In any case, given the situation as it is today on the Palestinian ground, one would have expected Arafat and Rabin to agree to bring forward the "final status" negotiations. That would then have been a major breakthrough. But then, the Israeli posture of "full commitment" to the terms of the Declaration of Principles would not have allowed that to happen.

What concerns us in Jordan most is the continuing deterioration of the situation in the occupied territories.

Arafat and Rabin could meet every day or every hour but if those meetings do not produce tangible results in terms of the living conditions of the Palestinian people, then there is little sense in pinning hopes that the peace process, at the direction and pace it is going now, would produce a just solution and bring about an end to the decades-old conflict in the region.

From our vantage point the main component in the stalemate in the Israel-PLO track is Rabin's political inability to offer the peace process the right momentum and push that it requires. Rabin is tied down by the political consideration that he could not offer any "concessions" to the Palestinians because such a move would seriously undermine his standing with the electorate and destroy his political future.

We do understand the political requirements of Rabin to continue in power for some time more if only because of the certainty the situation could only get worse in the event of his Labour Party's rival, Likud, and its leader Benjamin Netanyahu, scoring success in their campaign to topple him and call early elections. But what we do not understand is why the fate of an entire people who have suffered for so many decades simply because suffering suited the world powers to be tied to an individual's or party's political future.

The crackdown that Arafat has been forced to order against his own people to appease the Israelis is the best example yet of this Israeli "prerequisite". But what is being

eroded in the bargain is the political standing of Arafat and the PLO to the detriment of the chances of success of the peace process. This basic contradiction does not seem to be understood or appreciated by Israel, which, given its way, would definitely like to have the PLO chairman assuming the role of Antoine Lahad in the Gaza Strip and acting as a policeman for his own people rather than the leaders of an independent people who yearn for a life in freedom and dignity.

All said and done, it is very clear that there is no magic solution to the deadlock in the Israeli-Palestinian track except of course an immediate Israeli move to withdraw entirely to the pre-1967 lines with no exception, leaving the Palestinians to handle their own affairs. Israel will have to take the "painful" decision to evacuate the Jewish settlements in the West Bank regardless of the political price that Labour would have to pay for such a move.

Of course, there cannot be an overnight move along those lines. It needs careful planning and approach, but the process has to start sooner than later if Israel wants to put an end to the cycle of violence and extremism that is threatening to undermine everything that has been achieved in the peace process so far. That would mean Israel ought to drop its demands on how the Palestinians should run their affairs and bring forward the final status negotiations. That might be in contradiction of the Declaration of Principles, but then will that be the first time the declaration has been contradicted by the Israelis?



Arabs should have a unified stand against Israel's nuclear threat

By Elia Nasrallah

THE LOCAL Arabic dailies last week discussed Israel's nuclear capabilities and their threat to the Arab Nation, the deadlock in the Middle East peace process on the Israel-Palestine track and a host of domestic affairs.

In discussing Israel's nuclear power, a columnist in Al Dustour daily said that the current Arab efforts to force Israel to sign the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT) is not only an Egyptian undertaking but rather a pan-Arab endeavour to ensure pan-Arab security. The Arab countries are due to discuss the issue at the Arab League level in the coming month and it is then that they will show whether they are united on this issue or whether they are in disarray in the face of Israel's threats.

Sultan Al Hattab, a columnist in Al Ra'i, called on the Arab masses to protest against Israel's continued acts of repression on the Palestinian people. The writer said that protests can be made through the Israeli embassies in Amman and Cairo and can be presented at the official and popular levels. We should not bury our heads in the sand and pretend that nothing is happening in Israeli-held Arab lands, where our kinsmen are facing untold suffering.

Tareq Masarweh, a columnist in Al Ra'i daily, criticised the U.S. Secretary of State Warren Christopher for demanding that the Arabs and not Israel should sign the NPT in April. The writer said that the United States, which is keen on protecting the Jewish state, does not care whether the Israelis threaten the Arabs with nuclear weapons or not as long as Tel Aviv possess the means to protect itself.

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in Al Dustour that negotiations with the Israelis do not help to secure the withdrawal of occupation forces from Arab lands if they are not backed by resistance activities. The writer said that Israel does not wish to withdraw from Arab land and nice words would not force it to pull out its forces. He said that the Palestine National Authority (PNA) should use the resistance and encourage resistance activity as a way for forcing Israel to accept and comply with the requirements of peace.

Mohammad Mahasneh, a writer in Al Dustour, commented on the Arab-Israeli-American meeting in Washington, saying the meeting was a failure because it could not force the Israelis to comply with the peace requirements. The Palestinian-Israeli track has been derailed due to Israel's fears of the self-rule, which is bound to extend to other Palestinian lands and deprive the Jews

lished the names of those responsible for the firm's failure, and bad them account for their actions. Since members of the board of directors receive payment in return for their efforts when their companies achieve success, he added, these board members ought to be made to account for their actions in case of failure.

In discussing the carnage on the roads as a result of road accidents, Mohammad Kawash, a writer in Al Dustour, said that increasing penalties on violators of traffic rules might not deter motorists from speeding or reckless driving. The writer said that the spreading of awareness among the public against speeding for instance, should be stepped up not only through the media but rather through the schools and the local communities. The latest increases in the number of road accidents reflect the fact that all measures which have been taken to curtail accidents have gone in vain and, said the writer, the time has come for the concerned authorities to try their hand at a different approach.

George Haddad, a columnist in Al Dustour, said it has become clear to all Arabs and the world at large that it is the Americans who insist on maintaining the embargo on Iraq. Despite the implementation of all U.N. resolutions, the Iraqis are still under siege because the United States wants to peddle its weapons and sell its arms to the Gulf states, which Washington continues to warn against Baghdad's imaginary threat, said the writer. It is regrettable, he said, that the government's moves to deal with public share holding companies or semi-official organisations came too late. The government decision is an open admission that the failure of these firms resulted from mismanagement and the incompetence of officials, said Mohammad Daoud.

The writer said it would be a wise step on the part of the government if it pub-

THE WEEK IN PRINT

ings, said the writer. It is regrettable, he said, that not one Arab regime has yet protested to Israel over its inhuman treatment of Palestinian people under its occupation.

His call was echoed by the daily Al Aswad, which said that the Arab countries have not yet reached a consensus on how to deal with the Israeli nuclear threat, largely due to inter-Arab differences.

Israel does not want to open its nuclear installation to international inspection and it pursues efforts to build its nuclear arsenal, said the writer. Israel's refusal to sign the NPT, said the writer, gives rise to Arab fears that the Jewish state is determined to impose a settlement on the Arab Nation through the power of nuclear weapons and with backing from the United States. It is regrettable, said the writer, that the Arabs remain in disarray in the face of the common threat that is posed to their present and

is state of continued occupation, said the writer. The implementation of peace would mean a halt in Israeli settlement construction and curtailing of Israel's power, something which is feared by the settlers and the Israeli government, he added. The writer said since its inception, the PNA has been facing obstacles created by the Israeli government, which is intent on maintaining its hold on Arab lands.

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Gulf states frustrated but may sign NPT

By Ashraf Fouad

break point. There is a lot at stake."

Reuter

DUBAI — Unwilling to give regional rivals Iran and Iraq pretexts to stay out of a global nuclear non-proliferation pact, Saudi-led Gulf Arabs may be persuaded to sign it despite their anger at Israel's refusal to do so.

The United States has been trying to persuade the GCC that it should follow Iran, Gulf-based diplomats said.

"The GCC should take the moral high ground and not hold hostage a treaty of great impact on global peace. Iran is being fairly shrewd about this (NPT issue)," one Western diplomat said, reiterating Washington's argument.

But Arabs are dismayed that this pressure does not appear to include Israel, which has never signed the treaty.

Washington is pushing its allies hard to sign the nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT) when it comes up for renewal in April.

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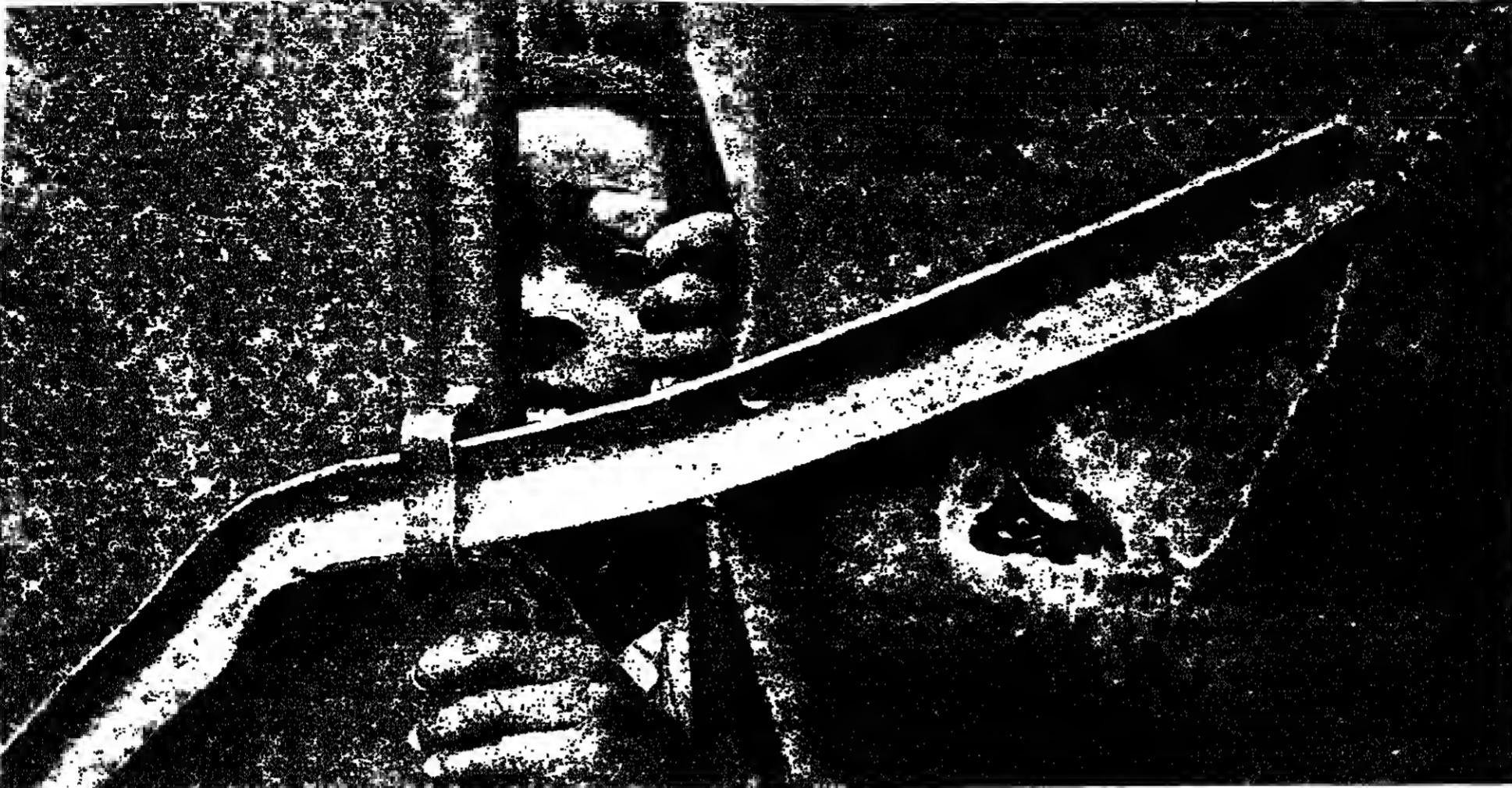
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Washington is pushing its allies hard to sign the nuclear Non-P

Somalia braced for new dark age

Mark Huband hears a 'moderate' say US peacekeeping 'bastards' don't have to be shot — then sees a local have to limbs cut off



Eye of the storm: The withdrawal of UN forces next month is clearing the way for a showdown as Somali factions take advantage of a diplomatic disaster

those (American) bastards."

Mr. Ato is planning to sue the U.S. government for the ill treatment he received in 1993 when the U.S. declared war on Gen. Aideed and his followers.

"But Aideed has become so hard that he may find that everybody has abandoned him."

Throughout the city the newly aligned and newly split clans and sub-clans plot and counter-plot over who will be president when the U.N. leaves for good.

The timetable for the departure has been kept extremely vague. While the U.N. mandate officially

ends on March 31, the Americans said on Friday that they hope to be out during the first week of the month.

All U.N. civilians are now hunkered down at Mogadishu airport, having moved from the former American embassy compound 12 days ago. The compound was soon surrounded by gunmen who had camped outside overnight before the U.N. left.

The U.N. civilians were due to leave Mogadishu by Tuesday. The American troops, their helicopters and AC-130 bombing and surveillance planes flying

overhead, arrived by overflight all last week.

The troops will take over the port on Feb. 27 to provide a 'united shield' as the Pakistani, Malaysian, Bangladeshi and other U.N. troops leave.

The anti-shark net, which was strung beneath the waves just off the coast to allow U.N. employees to swim in peace, has already been removed so that U.S. amphibious craft can land. Thousands of tonnes of equipment now in the port is being removed as quickly as possible, to avoid it falling into the hands of the gunmen responsible for

biggest disaster in U.N. history. Perhaps nothing now could reunite the Habergidir leadership except war against their common enemy — the Abgal clan of north Mogadishu. But now men such as General Mohammad Nur Galal, who is emerging as leader of Gen. Aideed's fighters, are making extensive contacts with the Abgal clan and its leader, Ali Mahdi Mohammad, in a bid to reconcile with the other clans."

After five years of civil war, Gen. Aideed's men, patrolling in their gun-mounted Toyota Land Cruisers, are as beligerent as the city of rubble, bullet-riddled villas and sand-clogged streets.

Gen. Galal is short, smartly dressed, with grey hair and a friendly manner, and says: "When Aideed sees the Habergidir

splitting, he always creates a conflict to reunite them. In the past the Habergidir have always been willing to follow him. But there have been many casualties. Most of the Habergidir are ready to reconcile with the other clans."

To avoid his eclipse, Gen. Aideed has secured the support of Muhammad Kanyare Afrah — who defected from Ali Mahdi last September and is now his closest military ally.

The question is: Who will be in the top seat. Which clan and which person?" said Mr. Farah, who is now based in a few dark and sheltered rooms at a

Mogadishu hotel whose courtyard teems with his gunmen. "We are not ideologists. There's nothing for nothing. Politics isn't holy. It's interests. When we are in politics we are salesmen. We sell the politics to people. And every clan and sub-clan has the same concern."

Ali Mahdi must accept Gen. Aideed as president and himself as vice-president. If he refuses, or forms his own government, then there will be fighting. "We will attack to eliminate," he said.

The U.N. Somalia having spent \$2.5b. Its mission has been a qualified success on a humanitarian front, its military mission a failure and its political aim of bringing law, order and government back to Somalia a complete disaster.

"The departure is a race against time to a certain extent. It's unprecedented for a U.N. operation to be functioning but also packing up," said George Bennett, the UNOSOM spokesman.

Private contractors working for the U.N. are feeling the hurt of the rush to leave. The U.N.'s Australian contractor, Morris Supplies, which had a \$100m contract to feed the troops and civilians, reckons the U.N. will owe \$20m in unpaid bills by the end of the month.

The company claims it does not have the money to pay off its workers, but its Somali employees and local traders to whom it owes money will not let them go.

"Before they kill us, one of us will get kidnapped. That's the way they operate. There's no way if we backed now that we would make it to the airport. We owe too much money to leave here alive, and we have told the U.N. that," said Morris's managing director, Robert McVicker, who has a private army which will guard him until the bills are paid.

Back on the streets, the militias will be extorting, threatening and killing to survive, plunging the country once more under the rule of the gun, as the world closes its eyes on what Somalia is to become.

The Observer

King guest of honour at summit

(Continued from page 1)

March 6 to 12.

In less than a fortnight two major crises in the diplomatic field deriving partly from the upcoming summit have embarrassed the Danish government.

A visit by Iranian Deputy Foreign Minister Mahmood Vaezi, who, due to the fatwa issued against British author Salman Rushdie, was denied entry to neighbouring Norway and Sweden, aroused harsh attacks in both the parliament and the majority of the press.

Many critics accused the government of neglecting insistence on human rights in order to protect the Danish export of feta cheese which

last year amounted to 28,000 tonnes to Iran.

Observers assessed that the government deemed a non-committal conduct necessary in view of its impending role as host of several other foreign government representatives from countries being accused of flagrant violations of the world charter on human rights.

Hardly had the Iranian visitor departed for Paris from Copenhagen airport before a journalist arriving from Accra at the very same airport forced the Danish government into swift action to prevent impending accusations of racism.

Neglecting a fully valid visa the passport police denied entry for the Ghanaian reporter.

Arafat rejects 'Jenin-first' offer

(Continued from page 1)

During the symposium, entitled "The Mediterranean After the Peace. What Future?" guests — including

Juppe warns Egypt in NPT row

(Continued from page 1)

means to hint that Egypt is going in a direction hostile to Israel. I feel sorry for this ... I wish Rabin will be more accurate rather than complicating relations between us," Mr. Mubarak said in Cairo.

But Israel has refused, citing its special "security" concerns, and has never confirmed Western reports that it possesses about 200 nuclear warheads.

Mr. Musa reassured Thursday in Bonn, after talks with German Foreign Minister Klaus Kinkel, that his government could not commit itself to a prolongation of the NPT unless Israel also signed the treaty.

Israel insists it will not sign the treaty until it is satisfied that countries will not sign the treaty until it is satisfied that countries like Iran, Iraq and Libya do not pose a threat to it.

"Mr. Rabin wants by all

Ekeus to probe

(Continued from page 12)

of \$14 a barrel for similar Middle Eastern oil, the paper said.

"That's a big discount, which explains why many of us are willing to take risks to move that oil," an unnamed London-based trader told the Times.

The United Nations allows Iraq to export just 75,000 barrels a day to Jordan, to cover Iraqi costs for the purchase of medicine and food. The country had been exporting 2.5 million barrels a day before the Gulf war, for revenues of \$12.7 billion a year.

Using the clandestine network, Iraq is exporting about 200,000 barrels a day, the Times said.

U.S. Secretary of State Warren Christopher said Thursday the State Department is looking into the New York Times story.

He pointed out the United States has been the leader in trying to ensure that the sanctions against Iraq are enforced. "Embargoes or sanctions are seldom perfect, and there unfortunately is almost always a certain amount of leakage," he said. "We're looking into this particular report. If accurate, we would certainly want to take steps with respect to that leakage. But the important thing overall is to understand how much pressure we have put on the Iraqis, how important those sanctions are."

He noted that the U.N. resolutions provide an opportunity for the Iraqis to sell their oil and use the proceeds for humanitarian purposes. "They've been unwilling to do that, which can only mean to us that if they sell their oil they probably want to use the funds they get for weapons purchases or some other deleterious purpose," Mr. Christopher said.

The White House Press Secretary Mike McCurry confirmed the report that Iraq is selling oil in violation of United Nations sanctions, but in quantities far below those cited. "Our own experts estimate" the leakage is 80,000 to 100,000 barrels a day rather than 200,000 barrels, he said.

Meanwhile, the government is continuing with preparations for presidential elections to be held before the end of the year.

Mr. Mubarak denied allegations made by Mr. Rabin to parliament that Egypt tried to influence African states, including Tanzania, Djibouti and Comoros.

"Mr. Rabin wants by all

Algerian

(Continued from page 12)

The Armed Islamic Group (GIA), the most radical of the factions fighting the military-backed regime, and the AIS, the armed wing of the outlawed Islamic Salvation Front (FIS), have threatened more suicide attacks. On Jan. 30, a suicide bombing in central Algiers killed 42 people and injured 286. The GIA claimed responsibility for the attack.

Mr. Muharak denied allegations made by Mr. Rabin to parliament that Egypt tried to influence African states, including Tanzania, Djibouti and Comoros.

"Mr. Rabin wants by all

Opposition says Iran trains kamikaze pilots against Israel

TEL AVIV (AP) — Iran is training Kamikaze pilots to attack Israel and plans to send spies masquerading as immigrants to the Jewish state, an exiled Iranian opposition figure said in an interview published Friday.

Manouchehri Ganji said he chose to talk to the Yedioth Ahronoth daily because he wanted or win support in Israel for Iranian expatriates seeking to topple Iran's Shiite Muslim fundamentalist rulers.

"I think that Israel has an interest in helping the Iranian opposition topple the government of terror," said Mr. Ganji, who lives in Paris and has a small group called the Organisation for Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms in Iran.

Mr. Ganji, a former Iranian education minister, said he was looking for help in building a shortwave radio station to broadcast from France to Iran.

Mr. Ganji, who claims he is number one on Iran's

wanted-dead list, quoted what he said were reliable sources in Iran who told him the government was training suicide pilots for missions to Israel. He said the pilots were trained in secret camps.

"According to the report, four pilots have completed the course and have already left Iran in order to get ready for the mission," Mr. Ganji told Yedioth Ahronoth.

Mr. Ganji also said that Iran is planning to send agents to Israel. "They will go undercover as Jewish immigrants, apparently from Syria, but this is not definite," he said.

The director general of Israel's defence ministry, David Ivri, warned in an interview Friday that Iran was buying sophisticated war planes and long-range missiles that could reach Israel.

The Iranian threat is not an immediate one, but if we do not prepare ourselves now, we are liable to find ourselves without a satisfactory way to

respond in the future," Mr. Ivri told the daily Davar.

Amid U.S. pressure to isolate Iran, the country's supreme leader warned Friday that the Iranian nation would not buckle, Tehran Radio reported.

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Mr. Ganji also said that Iran is planning to send agents to Israel. "They will go undercover as Jewish immigrants, apparently from Syria, but this is not definite," he said.

The American administration has given high priority to isolating Iran but has had difficulty winning broad international support. Germany maintains close ties with Iran and a Russian agreement to provide nuclear reactors and training to Iran is a sore point in U.S. relations with Moscow.

U.S. officials have pushed hard — thus far successfully — to persuade Japan not to go ahead with the loan, which is the second installment on a power project said to be worth \$1.5 billion. Japan says the loan request is still alive.

"The U.S. government is expressing its concerns, and we take into consideration what they say," said Hiroshi Hashimoto, an official at the Japanese embassy in Washington.

He noted that the proposed loan would not be earmarked for the Iranian government, but for the Iranian firms carrying out the project in the southern part of the country.

In response to statements by U.S. officials that Japan has deferred a decision, Mr. Hashimoto said: "There is no set period as to when we should decide."

He acknowledged there is a fundamental difference in the way Japan and the United States perceive Iran.

"We believe it is very dangerous to isolate Iran," he said.

Russians, Chechens extend truce

(Continued from page 1)

by the people," he said. Chechen cleric Muhammed Alasbekov said meanwhile Russian Prime Minister Viktor Chernomyrdin intends to order a halt in fighting in Chechnya until March 5, the end of the Holy Month of Ramadan.

The mufti said Mr. Chernomyrdin had made the undertaking in a meeting with Chechen spiritual leaders Wednesday.

Mr. Alasbekov said the Muslim clerics would also try to stop military operations on the Chechen side. The Chechen people would never "oppose the clergymen," he said, quoted by the news agency Interfax.

A Russian parliamentary

commission set up to assess the Chechen conflict has summoned senior political and military leaders for a hearing Monday.

Among those summoned by the commission are Russian Defence Minister Pavel Grachev, the architect of the intervention in Chechnya that started on Dec. 11, former Russian Deputy President Alexander Rukosol, and former Parliamentary Speaker Ruslan Khasbulatov, a leader of Chechen opposition.

Also called to appear were Salambek Khadzhev, the former Soviet petrochemicals minister Moscow wants to put at the head of a new Chechen government, Nationalities Minister Sergei Shakhrai, and former Prime Minister Yegor Gaidar.

Jordan Times
Tel: 667171

Yemen grapples with inflation, budget deficit

SANAA (R) — Yemen is suffering from raging inflation and the government is resorting to printing money to fund its budget deficit, Deputy Prime Minister Abdul Wahab Ali Al Ans said.

"The situation has reached the stage where the state's job has become one of producing money... it has become a money producer," Mr. Ans said a news conference Thursday.

Mr. Ans said the start of economic reform in Yemen, one of the most impoverished Arab countries, "is to cut down the budget deficit by finding new resources for the state."

He declined to disclose the deficit. Yemen had no budget for 1993 and 1994 because of political instability which led to a two-month civil war between north and south last year. The 1995 budget has not yet been presented to parliament.

Unemployment is running at 30 per cent of the estimated workforce of four million.

This week Yemen increased prices of state-controlled food by between 121 and 196 per cent. Prices of some foods are soaring on the black market. Yemenis buy locally produced vegetables, meat and eggs have risen by 60 to 100 per cent in recent weeks.

The price of imported goods has shot up as Yemen's currency continues to lose value.

An official newspaper said last Sunday that authorities had arrested wholesalers to stop prices from spiralling

further.

Mr. Ans declined to disclose figures on inflation which economists and diplomats said ranges from 60 to 100 per cent.

The government has held talks with the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and the World Bank, but diplomats said it did not seem to be acting on their recommendations.

The IMF was reported to have recommended unifying the two-tier exchange rate to 50-55 riyals per dollar, replacing an official rate of 12 riyals and a central bank-sanctioned free rate of 84 riyals. The riyal trades at about 110-120 to the dollar on the illegal black market.

Mr. Ans said reforms would require tightening expenditures, controlling revenues, allowing the private sector more freedom and tackling the problem of subsidies.

He said Yemen spends \$400 million annually to subsidise wheat and flour. Mr. Ans said the official price of wheat and flour was about one tenth of the real value.

The state recently raised prices of these staples by 36 per cent and 25 per cent respectively but residents said there were shortages and that the black market price was 200 to 300 per cent higher.

To start with, subsidies is a wrong policy. It encourages corruption," Mr. Ans said.

He hinted that Yemen might increase the price of petrol and gas. The price of a small bottle of mineral water is three times that of one litre of petrol.

U.S. posts worst merchandise trade deficit

WASHINGTON (AP) — The United States posted its biggest merchandise trade deficit in history last year as a surge in imports swamped a record level of exports, the Commerce Department reported Friday.

The deficit soared by 25.4 per cent last year to \$166.29 billion, compared to a 1993 shortfall of \$132.58 billion.

President Clinton has cited big market-opening deals as one of his major achievements since taking office, but new figures demonstrated the challenges the United States faces in the global economy.

Deficits with Japan and China both set records last

year. The Japanese imbalance climbed 11 per cent to \$65.7 billion while the trade gap with China surged at an even faster rate of 30 per cent to \$29.5 billion.

These figures count only trade in merchandise. If services are also included, the 1994 trade imbalance totals \$108.11 billion, 43 per cent higher than a \$75.73 billion goods and services deficit in 1993.

In a glimmer of hope, the deficit in merchandise and services narrowed in December to \$7.34 billion, the smallest monthly deficit in nine months.

Many economists believe U.S. trade fortunes will im-

prove this year as growing economies overseas boost U.S. exports while America's growth rate slows, thus cutting demand for foreign goods.

However, they concede that the recent economic troubles in Mexico, which is America's third largest export market, will dampen whatever improvements occur as the weaker peso makes U.S. exports more expensive in Mexico while making Mexican goods cheaper in this country.

Even before December's steep plunge in the peso, the U.S. surplus with Mexico was shrinking. For the year, the surplus totalled \$1.34 billion, down 19 per cent from 1993 and an even steeper drop from 1992 when the United States had enjoyed a \$5.8 billion surplus with Mexico.

The lower surplus in 1994 occurred even though U.S. exports to Mexico climbed by 22.3 per cent. This gain was offset by a 24 per cent rise in Mexican imports.

Opponents of the North American Free Trade Agreement, which is eliminating trade barriers among the United States, Mexico and Canada, have predicted that America's surplus with Mexico will vanish altogether this year because of the plunge in the value of the peso.

The \$166.29 billion merchandise deficit for last year surpassed the 1987 record for goods on a balance of payments basis of \$159.6 billion.

The combined deficit of \$108.11 billion in merchandise and services was the largest imbalance since a record \$114.8 billion deficit recorded in 1988.

The goods and services figure was aided by the fact that U.S. exports of services such as travel and consulting fees climbed to an all-time high of \$58.2 billion, helping to offset somewhat the merchandise deficit.

For the year, exports of merchandise climbed 10.1 per cent to an all-time high of \$502.8 billion. However, foreign imports of merchandise climbed an even faster 13.5 per cent to \$669.09 billion, also a record level.

The trade figures would have looked even worse if oil prices had not fallen in 1994. The average prices per barrel was \$14.22, the lowest since 1988. Even with the price decline, America's foreign oil bill rose to \$60.54 billion, up 5.9 per cent from 1993, as the volume of shipments rose.

Imports of autos and auto parts, another big factor in America's chronic deficits, climbed 15.8 per cent to \$118.64 billion last year.

Mark allure irresistible despite headaches at home

FRANKFURT (R) — The German mark jettisoned higher Friday, unaffected by the threat of a massive engineering strike, as investors across the world clamored for sanctuary from tumult elsewhere, senior currency dealers said.

"Internal German issues and interest rates and external interest rates are totally irrelevant at the moment. People are just getting out of everything it's not marks and into marks," said Victor von Klempner, the head of foreign exchange at Dresdner Bank A.G. in Frankfurt.

Some say the move has just begun, others say it's overdone.

"There's no end in sight," said Michael Burkhardt, foreign exchange manager at Helaba in Frankfurt. "Dollar/mark could go to 1.40, mark/lira to 1.100 — anything's possible."

The dollar fell to a low of 1.4768 marks in Friday morn-

ing, hitting its weakest level since October 1992, and the lira was bid at a record low 1.086.75 to the mark.

If anything, immediate domestic factors — other than the prospect of higher interest rates down the road — might suggest a weaker mark short-term, the dealers said. But no one is looking at such factors.

The mark has soared some two per cent against the lira and sterling in the past six trading sessions, and has jumped some four per cent against the dollar.

It has jumped even though Germany's powerful engineering union I.G. Metall has threatened a strike before month's end to back its demands for a six per cent wage hike.

But the prospect of a widespread strike, and its potential to choke economic recovery, would likely weigh on the mark if anyone were paying attention to it, said

Reto Feller, chief spot dealer at Commerzbank.

One theory making the rounds in the market suggests the opposite — that an inflationary package would persuade the Bundesbank to push rates higher sooner rather than later.

Few here believe, however, that the union has the clout to drive through an inflationary wage deal or that employers have any reason to rush into an expensive accord. Many see a three per cent rise.

Dealers in Frankfurt largely dismissed this speculation linked to interest rates as unrealistic.

"That's silly," Mr. Feller said. The mark is up because "people still trust the mark."

Indicating that the rush to marks was simply safe-haven buying, he added: "You can see that in the stability of the Swiss franc."

The franc, another traditional harbour in times of market stress, has been holding its own against the mark.

The market is also paying no heed to a regional election on Sunday in the German state of Hesse.

Ninety-five per cent of traders worldwide don't know its happening," Mr. Von Klempner said.

The recent European foreign-exchange agonies were kicked off in Britain amid Conservative Party bickering over the future of Europe that undermined sterling. The tumult spread like wildfire to encompass the currencies of Spain, Portugal and Italy.

Some experts said the mark's gains had been overdone. The head of foreign exchange at a top German foreign exchange bank said, "It's exaggerated. There's no reason for the mark to be higher in Europe."

Commerzbank's Feller agreed, saying "it's overdone at these levels."

South African economic outlook brightest in a decade

JOHANNESBURG (R) — South Africa's economic prospects are at their brightest in a decade, but the country has yet to escape the "new growth trap" which had plagued it in its top economic years, said Mr. Van Rensburg, economic director at the South African Chamber of Commerce.

"The jury is still out on whether we will be able to break out of that trap on a sustainable basis," he told a news conference.

The chamber said the economy could grow 3.5 per cent in 1995 after expanding 2.1 per cent in 1994, the second year of slow recovery from its longest recession on record.

But, with population growth running at nearly 2.5 per cent a year, much stronger sustained economic expansion was needed to improve general living standards significantly.

"If you look where we're coming from, that (growth prospect) is good. But if you look at where we're going,

it's not," chamber director general Raymond Parsons said.

Official figures show nearly half of the potential labour force is unable to find work in the formal sector of the economy. And, said Mr. Van Rensburg, it was able to absorb less than one in 10 new jobseekers, perhaps only one in 100.

The chamber predicted average inflation of 10 per cent this year versus 9.3 per cent in 1994, and a widening of the current account deficit to 3.5 billion rand (\$1.0 billion) from an estimated 1.0 billion (\$286 million) last year, which showed a marked deterioration from the nearly six billion rand (\$1.7 billion) surplus in 1993.

Net capital inflows last year, following a prolonged drain prior to last April's historic all-race elections, had boosted the central bank's gross gold and foreign exchange reserves by more than 50 per cent, it noted.

However, they still covered only about two months' worth of imports, and it was important such inflows continued. This in turn demanded

dedicated the country projected a good image to international investors.

"In the light of the recent crisis in Mexico, international investment flows are likely to be even more discerning and risk-averse," the chamber said.

Meanwhile, a Washington-based research group said South Africa has attracted a marked increase in American business and investor interest since the dying days of apartheid and sanctions.

The Investor Responsibility Research Centre (IRRC) said a survey of 69 U.S. pension funds and other institutional investors found that more than half were already investing or planned to invest in South Africa in the next year.

Notably these relatively bullish attitudes were expressed in August or September, before South Africa had even obtained formal risk assessments from leading American credit rating agencies Moody's and Standard & Poor's, and the Japanese agency Nippon.

It said U.S. corporations were nevertheless increasing their profile in South Africa, adding that this month 183 had direct investment or em-

ployees in the country.

This was a 36 per cent jump since President Mandela called for the lifting of sanctions in September 1993, several months before last year's historic all-race elections.

IRRC made no mention of the Mexican financial crisis which erupted in December and its potential impact on attitudes towards South Africa as investors reviewed emerging market risks and rewards.

It did say, however, that U.S. portfolio and corporate investors, while gradually showing more enthusiasm, still often had questions and concerns.

Representatives of several U.S. institutional (portfolio) investors that are not yet investing in South Africa told IRRC that they are waiting to see how the new government's policies will work, or that they do not have enough knowledge of South African investment conditions.

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IRRC made no mention of the Mexican financial crisis which erupted in December and its potential impact

Violence does not deter England's Euro plans

LONDON (AP) — English soccer officials vowed Thursday to forge ahead with plans to host next year's European Championship in England, saying its ticketing plans would thwart any attempts by hooligans to disrupt the tournament.

With European soccer governing body UEFA demanding a report into Wednesday night's riot by English fans at an international match in Dublin, the English Football Association said moving the championship would amount to a victory for the hooligans.

"Euro '96 should and must go ahead," FA spokesman David Davies told a press conference. "We understand the view of those who say the championship should not go ahead, but who would have won then: A tiny percentage of mindless thugs or more than a million genuine fans who want to have the footballing experience of a lifetime?"

Tournament director Glen Korten said the FA's 10-point ticketing plan would prevent any known hooligan from gaining admission to the championship, which takes place in eight cities from June 8-June 30, 1996.

"I can guarantee any one on our list of undesirables will not get a ticket," Korten said.

The FA said it had launched an inquiry into the incident and its report would be on its way to UEFA headquarters in Switzerland next week. UEFA, which has the power to move the tournament out of England, said it would pass the report along with one from the FA of Ireland, on to the championship's organising committee for consideration.

"It's a very sensitive problem," UEFA spokesman Salvatore Cuccu said. "We need time to see what we are going to do because it is the major football event in England that could be in danger."

"We will wait to hear the full report before we make the final decision," added UEFA President Lennart Johansson.

Several British newspapers and commentators in both Britain and Ireland called Thursday for England to withdraw as host. But FA chief executive Graham Kelly insisted his people could handle the job.

"We are fully capable, given the right policies and all the precautions that have been taken over the years, to carry on with staging that championship," Kelly said.

The riot began after Ireland scored the opening goal in the match at Lansdowne Road. English spectators, who had been taunting Irish supporters with Nazi salutes and chants such as "no surrender to the IRA," began breaking up the wooden and metal bleachers and hurling pieces of them at the Irish



Football chiefs face the media 16 February following Wednesday's riots during the Ireland vs England match in Dublin. (L-R) are Glenn Kirton, director of Euro '96, David Davis, media spokesman, and Football Association Chief executive

Graham Kelly. They called on genuine supporters to turn in the thugs and help them save the 1996 European Championships in the country (AFP photo)

Hooligans make headlines again

LONDON (AP) — Arrogant. Intimidating. Proud. Unashamed. The English soccer hooligan.

He's male, usually working class and poorly educated — and extremely right-wing.

It would be easy to say he's back. But he never really left.

"The belief in recent years that the problem has gone away or had even been cured, partly as a result of all-seater stadiums, is simply not true," said Eric Dunning of the Centre for Football Research at Leicester University.

The problem reared its ugly head again Wednesday night when hooligans forced the Ireland-England friendly in Dublin to be abandoned in the first half.

Ireland scored a goal to take the lead, that was the last straw. The hooligans began ripping up the very stands they were sitting on and throwing wooden planks, metal railings and other projectiles onto the fans in the deck below. Some 40 people were hospitalised.

It was a first even for England's notorious followers:

Never before had the national team — in more than 122 years of international play — been forced to abandon a match because of crowd trouble.

The offenders reacted not with remorse but with pride, waving and cheering to television cameras.

It was the same kind of defiance that had been seen time and again from England supporters across the continent in the 1970s and '80s.

In recent years, it appeared that the problem was on the wane after clubs and police tightened security in response to the fan violence of the '80s, which climaxed when 39 Italians were killed in a riot involving English spectators at the European Champions Cup final in Brussels, Belgium, in May 1985.

Although improved security measures have eased the problem since, the hooligans have continued to make their presence known. The last time England played a game of any importance, a World Cup qualifier in the Netherlands in October 1993, the English rioted in the streets of Rotterdam.

This latest violence was the latest in a spate of ugly incidents that have marred soccer since last summer's World Cup.

Fan deaths in Italy and France led to mass postponements of games in those countries, and French and Manchester United striker Eric Cantona was banned for the rest of the English League season after leaping into the stands to kick a spectator last month.

Irish PM condemns 'appalling thuggery'

In Dublin Irish Prime Minister John Bruton told a hushed parliament on Thursday that the soccer rioting that halted a friendly match between England and Ireland was caused by "appalling thuggery" by a minority of English fans.

Because of the English fans' notorious reputation, the ticket allocation for the national team's away matches is strictly controlled by official soccer travel clubs, but fans at Wednesday night's game said the hooligans could have easily purchased their tickets from scalpers

"Everything will continue as planned," Havelange said. "Because of a localised problem which should be dealt with by local authorities, England does not deserve to have a sporting right withdrawn."

Murphy said that the hooligans continued to make their presence known. The last time England played a game of any importance, a World Cup qualifier in the Netherlands in October 1993, the English rioted in the streets of Rotterdam.

But the ugliness in Ireland once again put soccer on the front page. British newspapers called the hooligans everything from "scum" to "lepers of the world."

"There actually as human as we are, but they adhere to different values," Murphy said. "They predominantly come from working class backgrounds and have an aggressive masculinity seen in the street culture, that manifests itself in many facets of society."

Murphy said the hooligans showed tendencies of xenophobia, racism and sexism.

"Being brought up in their kind of background, fighting becomes a source of status to them, part and parcel of this is gang formation and the willingness to hunt in packs."

No reply for England-Ireland match

England will not be returning to Dublin in the foreseeable future, despite Ireland manager Jack Charlton's plea to rearrange the match, abandoned after hooligans rioted on Wednesday night.

Charlton suggested the match could be rescheduled before the end of the season, but England's Football Association (F.A.) consider the idea impractical.

"It's a little bit early to start rearranging the match," F.A. spokeswoman Clare Tomlinson said Friday.

"There is still a lot of work to be done on finding out what went wrong and why it went wrong."

In the spring of 1996, the Olympic flame will be kindled from the rays of the sun in a traditional ceremony in Olympia, Greece, the birthplace of the Olympics. The Hellenic Olympic Committee will organise a torch relay across Greece before the torch is transferred to ACOG's guardianship.

The torch relay route we are planning will allow millions of Americans to view the Olympic flame as it passes through or near their communities," said Payne, who added that 10,000 torchbearers would have the opportunity of carrying the torch.

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Jordan's women's basketball team targets Asian Championship

By Aileen Bannayan
Special to the Jordan Times

AMMAN — Having waited for the past 12 years for it to open, most players now cannot believe it has come true. Now, the women's national basketball team has been fully regrouped, and players are actually training three times a week.

After the Jordan Basketball Federation (JBF) met with members of five clubs to announce the intention to regroup the team which last competed in 1983, forty players showed up for practice. Following a week of matches, the number was reduced to 20. Players representing Al Orthodoxi, Al Hisham and Al Ahli clubs are: Rana Huseini, Shireen Al Hudaib, Rania Al Dajani, Indira Qassemieh, Tala Al Khader, Tamara Al Khadra, Hind Al Ghouri, Suhaib Al Jazouri, Junana Salihi, Zein Sha'ha, Sirsa Naghaway, Sirsa Muheisen, Hala Khalaf, Zina Farah, Dima Shadad, Sirya Qardan, Maryam Ta'ani, Sirsa Ahzah, Hala Hattas, and Lubna Al Masri.

Now, the next big hurdle the JBF and its women's basketball committee will have to jump is coming with the necessary funding to enable the team to take part in the women's Asian Championship scheduled for July 23-30 in Japan.

Meanwhile, players are enthusiastic and putting up a big effort to adapt to each other's play while the coaches seek to further improve their individual and round ball and team spirit.

According to the training programme drawn up by the team's coaches Fadi Al Sabah and Saleh Al Zasher, a final 12 players of the team will be named in May after a thorough training schedule of up to five times a week and following the conclusion of the women's championship which is scheduled for April when players will be busy

playing for their respective clubs.

The coaches have advised that the JBF arrange some friendly matches against Syrian or Lebanese teams, host an Asian team in Amman in June and then play an Asian team on the way to Japan so as to be best prepared before the possible participation in the Asian Championship.

Despite the fact that the JBF had seemed serious about maintaining a national women's team, most players do not think they will have the chance to represent their country in Japan for the simple reason that the JBF has a budget of JD 12,000 while the youth's and men's teams also have their respective championships in the Philippines and Japan. Each delegation will cost the JBF a minimum JD 15,000.

In addition, players have become disillusioned by the offhand approach the women's game has received from officials over the past years. The JBF's regrouping of the women's team was quite overdue since a regular annual championship has been held since 1989 and many players have since quit sensing that their commitment to the game was leading nowhere.

Although having only a single two-week-long competition as an incentive to play, Al Orthodoxi, Al Ahli and Homenetmen maintained women's teams until 1991 when Al Jazouri entered the competition finishing fourth. They took third place from Homenetmen in 1992 and clinched the trophy by scoring a major upset against Al Orthodoxi in 1993. Al Orthodoxi regained the crown in 1994 in an incomplete championship when Al Jazouri abruptly pulled out of the competition citing differences with the JBF, while the only other competing team was Abu Nusair, a lowly newcomer. Homenetmen and Al Ahli stayed out of the competition with an incomplete lineup, while Al Watani registered a team for the first time but did not take part.

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Real Madrid Arvidas Sabonis
FP photo

AN BASKETBALL

Frederic Forre.
"We didn't play
the last eight but we knew
we were a little bit
said captain R.
Dacoury. "We are
that's all that really
Real Madrid
Salonika with strong
formance by foreign
das Sabonis of Lille.

STANDINGS

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Ekeus to probe Iraq's biological programme data

UNITED NATIONS (Agencies) — Iraq has the capability to develop biological warfare agents within weeks although it does not appear to be actively building the weapons to deliver them, according to a U.N. official. U.N. inspectors believe Baghdad has the expert knowledge and the equipment — chemicals and centrifuges — needed for production, Tim Treven, a spokesman for the U.N. Special Commission on Iraq, said.

The commission is charged with the dismantling of Iraq's nuclear, chemical and biological weapons, a condition of the cease-fire that ended the 1991 Gulf war.

Commission chief Rolf Ekeus left for Baghdad Thursday on a routine trip to review the elaborate network of cameras, sensors and over-flights used to detect any attempts to revive the weapons programmes. He also plans to press Iraqi officials for information on their past biological weapons programmes.

In December, Mr. Ekeus reported to the Security Council that Iraq's account of its past biological weapons programme was "minimal." Despite Iraqi claims that its programme was nascent and defensive, "indications all point to an offensive programme," he said.

Mr. Treven said that all the equipment and chemicals found by inspectors has legitimate purposes, such as producing medicines.

But he warned those same goods could be used to develop cholera, tuberculosis or other agents, and Iraq could do so within weeks if the inspectors left.

Several months ago, U.N. inspectors discovered several kilograms of a compound which deadly germs could be cultivated at the Al Hakem animal feed plant, Mr. Treven said.

U.N. inspectors destroyed

the compound after Iraqi officials could not prove it had a legitimate use, he said.

U.N. inspectors monitor the Al Hakem plant and other plants that could be converted to produce biological weapons through routine visits, by cameras installed at the plants and by testing samples of chemicals and products, Mr. Treven said.

The U.N. commission reports to the Security Council every six months on Iraq's weapons programmes. The reports have portrayed Iraqi officials as evasive and deceptive in meeting inspectors' demand for information.

Irqi compliance with the U.N. inspectors in setting up the monitoring programme is one of the Security Council's conditions for lifting the oil and trade embargo the United Nations imposed against Iraq after its August 1990 invasion of Kuwait.

The New York Times reported Thursday Baghdad has set up an underground network to export oil and bypass the U.N. sanctions.

Quoting unnamed oil industry executives and traders, the Times said the illicit sales have generated up to \$800 million in the past year for Iraq.

Hundreds of trucks take the crude oil to Turkey or Iran across Kurdish territory in the north of Iraq. The Kurds, who fought the Iraqi army immediately after the war, did not interfere with the trucks because they are allowed to collect a tax on each one, the Times said.

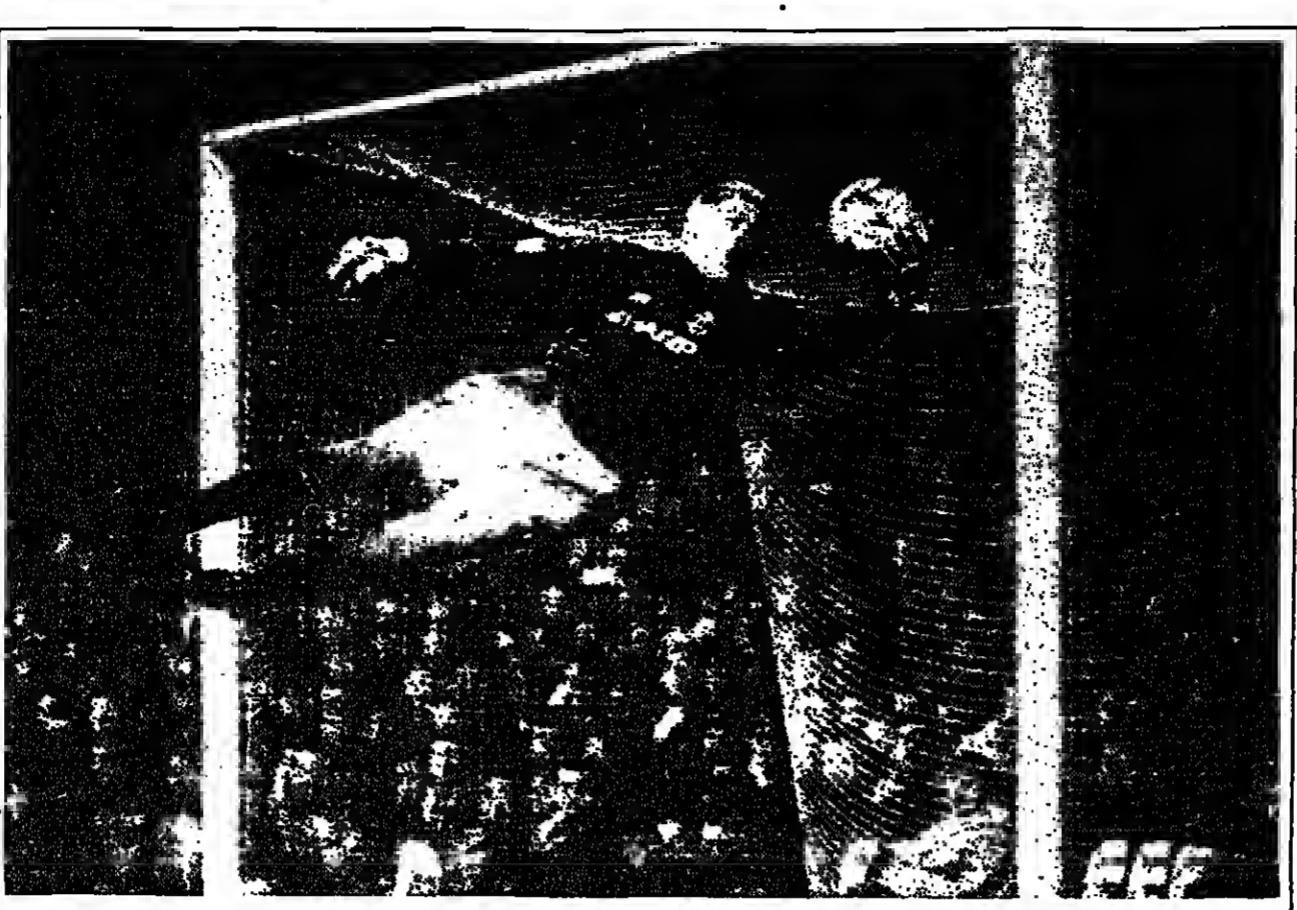
In their 1993 peace deal, Israel and the Palestine Liberation Organisation (PLO) made Jerusalem a "final status" issue to be decided in a three-year round of talks scheduled to begin next year.

Earlier this month, two New York senators — Democrat Daniel Patrick Moynihan and Republican Alfonse D'Amato — circulated a letter calling for the U.S. embassy to be moved from Tel Aviv to Jerusalem once those talks end in 1999.

The president has indicated a good deal of sympathy for the position taken by letter but he has also said he thinks we should do nothing to interfere or disrupt the process by which the parties might reach their own conclusion," Mr. Christopher said.

"Until the parties have reached a decision on this subject I don't think it would be appropriate for the United States to take some action that would be precipitous and might interfere with the peace process itself," the secretary of state added.

Nevertheless, the implication of his remarks — as in an interview with Reuters last week when he said the position of Mr. Moynihan and Mr. D'Amato was "not dif-



LENS IN ACTION: Goalkeeper Catch, first prize sports by David Spurdens, Sunday Express U.K. in the World Press Photo contest and exhibition '95 (AFP photo)

Christopher: No hasty action on Jerusalem

WASHINGTON (Agencies)

— Secretary of State Warren Christopher has cautioned against "premature action" in moving the U.S. embassy to occupied Jerusalem but admitted President Bill Clinton was sympathetic to an eventual move.

Mr. Christopher told a House of Representatives sub-committee that Washington did not want to do anything at present that would disrupt delicate talks between Israel and the Palestinians, especially over the sensitive issue of Jerusalem.

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Nevertheless, the implication of his remarks — as in an interview with Reuters last week when he said the position of Mr. Moynihan and Mr. D'Amato was "not dif-

ferent from ours" — was that the administration would like to move the embassy once the Israel-PLO talks conclude.

U.S. officials and independent analysts say Jerusalem is probably the most difficult of all the issues facing Israel and the Palestinians.

During his presidential campaign, President Bill Clinton told Jewish leaders in New York in March 1992: "I believe in the principle of moving our embassy to Jerusalem, but I do not think we should do anything to interfere with the peace process."

Since Mr. Clinton took office in January 1993, U.S. officials have preferred to say as little as possible on the issue, for fear of upsetting one side or the other and torpedoing the already shaky peace process.

In his comments on Thursday, Mr. Christopher emphasized it is the U.S. position to assist those who are taking risks for peace," Mr. Christopher said that because the Palestinian Authority "has taken major risks" in order to carry out the declaration of principles between Israel and PLO, "it is much in our interest to continue to support economic development within Gaza and Jericho."

With the Palestinians having difficulty containing terror within both areas, Mr. Christopher said he believes that during the past 10 days or two weeks PLO Chairman Yasser Arafat "has recognized that the terrorism is really aimed directly at him ... because the terror is undermining his ability to govern." He noted that Mr. Arafat has "taken stronger steps" than before, including the arrest of large numbers of members of the Islamic Jihad.

"We in the Izzedine Al Qassam brigades will not stand idle this time and your savage arrest of any holy struggler from Qassam will exact a very heavy price," the statement said.

Palestinian police have cracked down on radicals, rounding up 20 Hamas men in the last two weeks, according to Emad Faluji, a leader of the group.

But he said none of them were Hamas armed militants, and had not police impounded weapons, which the Qassam state claimed.

About 30 members of Islamic Jihad, a smaller group responsible for killing 21 Israelis near Tel Aviv last month, were also detained.

Like most Hamas political leaders, Mr. Faluji disassociates himself from his group's armed wing. "This is not our way of dealing with matters," he said of the threat.

At Palestine Mosque, meanwhile, Hamas supporters staged a short play mocking Palestinian police as corrupt and siding with collaborators against those fighting the Israelis.

In one scene, a Palestinian police officer, dressed in a green beret and dark sunglasses, sat in his office with his feet propped on his desk.

An assistant brought in a collaborator with Israel. The suspect was about to be sent to a cell when the officer's phone rang and he was ordered by a superior to release the man.

At few minutes later, a bearded Islamic activist was brought in on charges he fired at an Israeli army patrol. The officer beat the suspect, ordered his men to send him to a cell and then shouted, as they walked away, to "kill him."

Hamas and Islamic Jihad have claimed responsibility for a number of attacks since October that have killed 56 Israelis.

A pro-Arafat mosque preacher on Friday accused Syria of backing the suicide bombers in order to disrupt the Israel-PLO autonomy accord and prevent the expansion of self-rule to the West Bank. Israel has said that it would not withdraw from West Bank towns until Mr. Arafat proved he could foil suicide attacks.

It was unknown whether this was an isolated action by a group wanting to obtain arms, or whether it formed part of a new strategy by Islamic fundamentalists to spread the violence to neighbouring countries because of their support for the Palestinian authorities.

According to official figures, Islamic fundamentalists last year carried out 2,725 acts of violence targeting mainly infrastructures, transport and telecommunications.

"Why doesn't Syria send its own suicide bombers to Israel?" asked the preacher.

(Continued on page 7)

Yeltsin speech attacked from all Russian sides

MOSCOW (Agencies) — President Boris Yeltsin's state of the nation speech was attacked from all sides of the political spectrum on Friday for proposing no new solutions to Russia's old problems.

Communist Party leader Gennady Zyuganov dismissed the speech, delivered on Thursday, as "senseless, shameful" and devoid of any attempt at listing priorities for action.

On the other extreme in the Duma (lower house of parliament), former liberal Finance Minister Boris Yefimov said Friday that Mr. Yeltsin had ducked the essential question: "Who is responsible for the power crisis (in the Kremlin)?"

Similarly, the newspaper *Nezavisimaya Gazeta* said the speech was the result of rivalry between hardliners and democrats — "those who say everything is alright and the others who complain that nothing works."

"Yeltsin's speech was written by democrats. It will not be applied by bureaucrats."

A debate on Mr. Yeltsin's address in the Duma failed to materialise on Friday because parliamentary leaders were attending a conference on relations between the Kremlin and regional authorities.

A few parliamentarians cautiously identified one or two positive elements in Mr. Yeltsin's speech, although they said it was not clear how the president could implement his proposals.

Yegor Gaidar, former reform prime minister and leader of the liberal Russia's Choice party — the largest group in the Duma — said that Mr. Yeltsin's speech was "rather positive."

But he indicated that further reaction was premature until concrete policies emerged from the president's pledge to pursue economic reform, currency stabilisation, privatisation and the fight against inflation.

"Our support or lack of support won't be based on declarations, it will be based on practical policies," Mr. Gaidar said.

However, he criticised the president for refusing to denounce Russia's use of armed force to crush secessionists in Chechnya.

(Continued on page 7)

Cholera rife in Mogadishu

MOGADISHU (AFP)

— U.N. relief workers battled cases of cholera in Mogadishu Friday as troops of the U.S.-led Operation United Shield checked security at the city's port and airport after the firing of an anti-aircraft weapon.

Many Mogadishu's residents rely for water on contaminated wells, with the water moving around the city in drums on carts drawn by donkeys.

The U.N. World Health Organisation (WHO) reported 533 confirmed cases of cholera in south Mogadishu the past two weeks, with 11 deaths.

It said the number of cases was levelling off, however, and that no cholera had been reported in north Mogadishu, which is controlled by self-styled President Ali Mahdi Mohammad.

The agency also reported acute diarrhoea in several other regions of Somalia, but concluded that cholera was under control.

The U.N. Children's Fund (UNICEF) is chlorinating wells around south Mogadishu, and both agencies are conducting a public awareness campaign.

They are among the few agencies still active in Mogadishu.

Most expatriate relief agency staff have pulled back to Nairobi, the capital of neighbouring Kenya, while they wait to see whether Somalia collapses into chaos after the last U.N. troops leave during the first week of March.

Their retreat will be protected by 1,600 U.S. marines and 500 Italian troops on the ground, gunships in the air, and 7,000 troops from Britain, France, Italy, Malaysia, Pakistan and the United States aboard 18 warships.

Task force spokesman Jerry Broeckert, a U.S. Marine lieutenant colonel, said Friday that United Shield troops were reconnoitring the landing beaches and the perimeter of the area enclosing the port and airport, which will be sealed off when the marines land.

The reconnaissance follows the firing of a 37-mm anti-aircraft rocket two days ago which seemed to have just been a test.

Some of the murders this

also include prominent Afghans not linked to any of the militias.

Mr. Mestiri said he hoped the council could meet by Monday and assume control of the country at that point or soon after.

Even if the council comes to power as planned, no one is predicting a smooth transition.

There is still sporadic fighting in Kabul. At least two people were killed Thursday night in rocket duels between government troops and Hez-e-Wahdat, a Shiite Muslim militia.

Also, the Talibans, a recently formed militia made up of religious students, has advanced to the southern outskirts of Kabul and many believe the group will try to take over the city.

"No doubt about it, this is the closest we have been to an agreement," Mr. Mestiri told journalists.

Mr. Mestiri's plan calls for embattled President Burhanuddin Rabbani to step aside and for the warring factions to join hands on a multi-party council. The council would

also include prominent Afghans not linked to any of the militias.

Mr. Mestiri is scheduled to meet the Talibans on Saturday to try to persuade them to join the council — or at least encourage them not to attack the city.

On the front lines just 15 kilometres south of Kabul, Taliban leaders said their own ruling council would decide on the next move for the group.

"The only thing we want in Afghanistan is an Islamic government, with Islamic laws and an Islamic system," said Mullah Bar Jan, the commander of the Taliban's frontline troops.

The other Islamic militias say they want the same thing, but their three-year battle for power has discredited them in the eyes of many Afghans.

"There is shelling, robbing and looting. This is not an Islamic government, this is not in the Koran," said Mr. Bar Jan, who like many of the Taliban fighters wears a black turban.

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(Continued on page 7)

week aimed at "symbolic" targets, killing the national theatre director, Azaedine Medjoubi, the famous musician Rachid and the president of a feminist organisation, Nabilah Diahnne.

However, these attacks were only the tip of the iceberg. Outside the capital, kidnappings, murders — often accompanied by mutilation — and intimidations continue unabated, according to reliable witnesses.

"At night we have to barricade ourselves in our homes," a villager from the Kabylie region said. Isolated hamlets are most at risk.

"There is no one to protect us," an old man explained.

On Thursday, an opposition coalition, the Movement for the Republic (MPR), called on Algerians to defend themselves, saying the security forces were not up to the job. This call to organise "self-defence" units against attacks by armed Islamic fundamentalists was the first such move by a political group here.

The army meanwhile continued attacks on fundamentalist strongholds in line with its strategy to "eradicate" armed militants.

An official statement said that over 13 days, 105 armed fundamentalists had been killed both in Algiers and other parts of the country. There are no figures on the number of security forces killed.

And for the first time, according to diplomatic sources in Tunis, an attack was reportedly launched in a neighbouring country when six Tunisian policemen were killed in the southern tourist region of Sidi Bou Said.

It was unknown whether this was an isolated action by a group wanting to obtain arms, or whether it formed part of a new strategy by Islamic fundamentalists to spread the violence to neighbouring countries because of their support for the Palestinian authorities.

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